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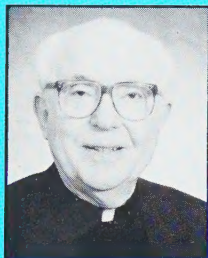
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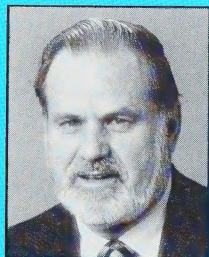
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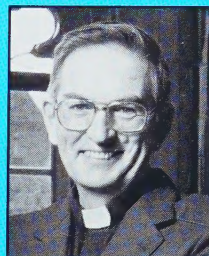
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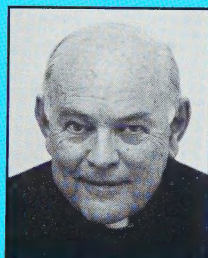
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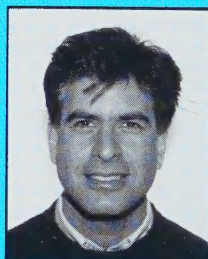
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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CONTENTS

5

HIGH-RISK PERFECTIONISM

Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.

9

EMPOWERING TOMORROW'S LAITY

Catherine M. Harmer, M.M.S., Ph.D.

12

LAST CALL FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE

Seán D. Sammon, F.M.S.

28

PASCAL TO THE PEAK

James Torrens, S.J.

31

ESSENTIALS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

35

UNDERSTANDING DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

40

CONVENT STRESS REVISITED

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

42

THE MANIC-DEPRESSIVE MINISTER

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

2

EDITORIAL BOARD

3

EDITOR'S PAGE

Poor, Humble, and Resurrected

48

BOOK REVIEW

Three Centuries of Lasallian Identity

By Pedro María Gil

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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

POOR, HUMBLE, AND RESURRECTED

If one judges by the daily media reports that currently portray the U.S. stock exchange as climbing gradually to unprecedented levels of attainment, it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that today's increasing wealth must be resulting in greater happiness among the American people. True, millions can now buy more luxurious cars, take vacations in more exotic locations, and multiply the designer labels in their wardrobes, but these and other symbols of affluence bring with them no guarantee that life will be more satisfying because they have been acquired.

In fact, as science reporter Alfie Cohn writes in the *New York Times*, psychological research during recent years has discovered that "people for whom affluence is a priority in life tend to experience an unusual degree of anxiety and depression as well as a lower overall level of well-being." Those who value "extrinsic goals" such as money, fame, and beauty, Cohn notes, are found to be more depressed than others, and they experience more behavioral problems and physical discomfort; they also score lower on measures of vitality and self-actualization.

Dr. Richard Ryan, professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, and Dr. Tim Kosser, assistant professor of psychology at Knox College, have recently stated that their studies revealed the "dark side of the American dream" and that the culture of affluence appears to be built on precisely what turns out to be detrimental to mental health. As they put it, "the more we seek satisfactions in material goods, the less we find them there." These researchers have learned that a preoccupation with money and material things is potentially hurtful, no matter how much money a person already has. They believe that it is not affluence per se that results in an unsatisfactory life; rather, people's problems are associated with "living a life [in which] that's your focus."

Surprisingly, Ryan and Kosser have found that college students who are already "relatively high in the attainment of appearance, financial success, and popularity" are nevertheless "lower in well-being and self-esteem." Those who aspire to affluence have more transient relationships, watch more television, and are more likely to use cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs than are students who place less emphasis on extrinsic, material goals.

The extrinsic goals currently being pursued by the majority of American college students are money, fame, and an ability to impress others. Specific intrinsic goals sought by fewer students include a sense of moral integrity, development of mature human attributes, and commitment to close and caring relationships. Both groups of students are attracting as much interest on the part of campus ministers and other spiritual guides as among research psychologists—but the purposes of the interested parties are worlds apart. The behavioral scientists are seeking explanations for the development of these different goal orientations and their effects on students' adult lives. The specialists in spirituality are concerned more about the goals' effects on the individual's relationship with God and its eternal consequences.

Many, if not most, specialists in Christian spirituality are accustomed to thinking about the pursuit of wealth and fame in terms of Ignatius Loyola's widely known meditation on the "two standards," in which he invites retreatants to consider and compare the strategies of God and of Satan. Ignatius first presents Satan as attempting to enslave human beings and the world according to his design. This personified spirit of evil begins by tempting individuals to inordinately desire material possessions. Then he leads them to overvalue and seek the honor and fame that can be attracted by these possessions. Finally, Satan tempts people to be proud—to hold an inflated view of who they are and how important they are. Thus, Ignatius teaches, riches bring honors, which in turn elicit pride, and this pattern leads to vices of all sorts

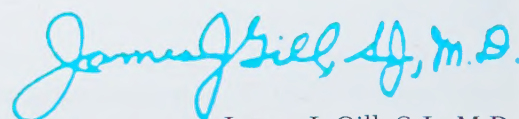
(for example, behavior that seeks self-gratification at the expense of the rights and dignity of others).

By contrast, Ignatius presents Jesus as striving to help people reach their life goal by first developing "poverty in spirit," which allows them to gain happiness without acquiring an abundance of goods. Jesus then teaches them to accept the fact that even though they lack honor and fame, they can still find joy and peace with him while they are being treated by others as insignificant and powerless, and even while feeling disdained. Finally, these persons live in a state of true humility—that is, recognizing that their whole reality lies in being created and redeemed in Christ. Through these steps, Ignatius observes, Jesus and those who minister with him lead people to all kinds of virtuous behaviors.

In view of the spiritual insights and guidance of Ignatius, it is urgent for all of us who work with the young to do whatever we can to help them learn that it is poverty in spirit, not possessions and popularity, that leads—when accompanied by humility—to the life of happiness we are all created to enjoy. The present

season of our Lord's passion and resurrection provides a perfect opportunity for us to deepen our awareness that Jesus, who had lived his entire life in humble association with the poor, won salvation for us all by obediently enduring powerlessness, disdain, rejection, and death. These were the purchase price of the happiness he has enabled us to enjoy, now and forever.

But don't forget to remind the young people who are pursuing their extrinsic goals that there is no place for material riches and ephemeral fame in the process of opening one's heart to experience with Jesus the sublime joy that comes with contemplating his victorious resurrection. Such bliss belongs only to those who are poor in spirit and humble of heart. May the grace of Easter draw us all into their ranks this year.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

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High-Risk Perfectionism

Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.

Shortly after I completed my studies and began to do pastoral counseling, a sister in charge of a small group of candidates in formation came to see me. Although she was not a regular client, we had known each other in the past, and with her recent change in ministry to the formation program of her congregation, she felt the need to “bounce some things off me” to gain perspective.

While I don't remember all that surfaced during our discussion that afternoon, one area in particular stands out. Even now, I recall her words almost as an echo, because they rang with such frustration and concern. “If I hear the word *perfect* one more time, I may scream,” she announced in exasperation. Elaborating on her statement, she told me that the group of candidates currently in the program was almost consumed with the idea of reaching perfection. “Everything they do is characterized by that word,” she continued. “Their tasks about the house are done ‘just perfectly’; their compliments to each other are punctuated by that word of praise; they even say it to me as if it would make my day to speak, clean, or do anything to perfection.”

A wise mentor of mine once observed that when anything stirs too much heat for its worth, one should look for the conflict or issue beneath it. I wondered what it was about the use of the word *perfection* that

stirred so much emotion in this sister. “It’s a whole attitude I see in these young women,” she noted, “one I had thought died with the revisioning of Vatican II—an attitude that the religious life and its ‘way’ are better, holier, and more conducive to perfection. It’s even more than that they expect that one day their efforts to live as women religious will lead them to perfection; it’s as if they need to be in that state now and that nothing done, said, or evidenced that falls below the criterion of perfection is acceptable. It is wearing me down.”

As I reflected on the word *perfection* and this sister’s discomfort with its overuse and even abuse by the women with whom she was working, a number of recollections came to mind. At first seemingly disconnected, they took on an interrelatedness. They also provided a new perspective on the possible origins and manifestations of perfectionist tendencies in this group of candidates and others of their peers.

DOSES OF REALITY NEEDED

The first recollection involved the young son of a client whom I had counseled when she was a continuing education student at a large state university several years before. While she had come to the

mental health services because of problems related directly to academics, she was also dealing with constant worries about her then five-year-old son. Although she saw him almost daily, he was being raised by her parents, for as a single mother and full-time student, she felt unable to give him the care he needed. The life of this boy, as his mother described it, conjured in my mind the image of a child "wrapped in cotton bunting" from the first few hours of life, with either herself or her parents ensuring that he wanted for nothing. Whatever made him happy, they provided; the idea of discomfort or want had never been allowed to enter into this boy's life. One day my client came into the session very upset over an incident that had taken place with her son the evening before. The child had come home from his preschool—the first outside-the-home environment he had experienced—distraught and saying that he never wanted to return again. If they made him go back, he said, he was going to do something "to make himself die like his cat Buddy." The young woman investigated what had happened that day and discovered that when teams were formed for some activity, her son was the last chosen for the game. The teacher said that he had "taken it pretty hard," crying and refusing to play, but she just wrote it off to his having a bad day. When the young mother talked to her son, he admitted that it was his being left until last that made him feel so upset. "If none of the other kids want me, then I don't want me either," he told her. "It's better not to be around than to have that happen."

While both the boy's grandparents and his mother were shocked at the intensity of his reaction, I was not—and some prominent theorists on whose teachings I rely would not have been surprised either. David Winnicott, the British object-relationist, speaks of the model of the "good-enough mother." By this term he means a mother who provides the necessary physical care, emotional stimulation, quieting, and a stable and predictable environment that can be the basis for mother-child bonding. Hans Kohut, another object-relations theorist, states that the imperfections of the good-enough mother in meeting the child's needs—her inevitable delays, failure to always respond immediately and completely, occasional lack of understanding, and inability to quell all the pains of illness, teething, and discomfort—provide doses of reality that mirror the world the child will inevitably face. My client's own desire to ensure that only the best, happiest, safest, and most comfortable world should surround her child, along with the double doses dealt by her parents, guaranteed that he would be unable to face hurt, pain, or disappointment with

anything other than feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness.

In an article on the connection between overgratification and contemporary trends of narcissism (*Review for Religious*, November/December 1991), Donna Markham and Loughlan Sofield see the "cornucopia kids" of the seventies and eighties as at least some of the candidates to religious communities. These young adults, catered to and supplied with every object of yearning by overzealous parents, are described in terms of the overflowing horn of plenty—and, like my client's little son, are unable to delay gratification for even a short time. Not all of the characteristics Markham and Sofield observe in this group of narcissistically oriented young people match those of the "perfect" candidates described by the sister, yet many of them call to mind her concerned statements. Among these are "low frustration tolerance" and "difficulties in managing ambiguous situations," along with difficulty in any situation that "demands commitment to steady, slow, long-developing processes in which results are frequently unrewarding." In the sister's words, "They want perfection—yesterday."

My other reflections centered on a series of young women whom I have counseled. Although not all of them are members of religious congregations, many are. These are the clients whom I call "recovering perfectionists." We joke that like the alcoholic—who, once aware of his or her problem, can maintain sobriety only by admitting that he or she is never recovered but always working on it—the past perfectionist is one who constantly feels pulled to slip back into the demanding, overly conscientious way of thinking and behavior that makes life miserable but so well done. These young women frequently enter into therapy with depressive symptoms of one kind or another—and that makes sense. Setting their standards at a level reaching (if not exceeding) 100 percent, A-plus, *perfect*, they face a constant sense of self-failure, even though the rest of the world envies their excellent achievement. Should such a woman receive an evaluation sheet for a class taught or a workshop given, she will overlook the strings of A's or comments of "Excellent" parading across the page and see instead the few lower scores that dot it. Should she hear glowing reports of something she has done, she will discount them as empty flattery or compliments coming from someone who doesn't really know her. Should one of her children (classroom or family) fail at an assignment or test, she will worry over what she did not do enough of to ensure success. Unlike Winnicott's model mother, these women feel that "good enough" is never good enough.

APPEAL OF RELIGION

To many young people seeking a perfect world, religious life—which, at least externally, seems to offer perfection—looks very attractive. Robin Heise and Jean Steitz (*Counseling and Values*, October 1991) note this attraction as one in which “perfection and sinlessness have been considered synonymous”; the one without sin is the person who keeps the law, whatever form the code takes. But, as they note, Christians who strive for holiness need to remember that Jesus was exalted by his Father not for being perfect but for being related: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). These writers cite the theologian Jacques Ellul when they emphasize that “God did not intend human beings to be perfect or to strive for that which is impossible on earth.” Why then, as they and many other counselors who work with religiously oriented people find, is religion perceived as the answer for so many perfectionistic people?

A commentary in *The Women's Study Bible* offers some insight on why the cornucopia kids of today's society may feel drawn to seek answers within religious life or seminaries:

Longing for absolute perfection is rooted in the lost recollection of Paradise. Within every believer is an internal barometer of how things ought to be, a deep yearning for the perfection that only heaven will bring. Something inside knows that no matter how good things are, they should be better. One day they will be, but not now. Knowing how it could be while living with how it actually is often causes an unhealthy tension.

Both theology and psychology support this observation. Adherents of the moral mandate to live a perfect life here and now often point to scriptural passages to support their platform. Included in these are the famous Matthean prescription to be “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48) and several passages in the Pauline letters (see Eph. 4:13, 1 Cor. 13:8–13; Phil. 1:6, and Col. 1:28 and 2:10).

Interestingly, however, when these citations emphasizing the call to perfection are considered in the context of the whole passage in which they appear, they point to a promised state of perfection one day—not now. The Greek word for “completed perfectly” (*telos*), used frequently in scripture, translates as “spiritually mature,” manifesting the qualities Paul outlines in Ephesians (4:13) as personified in Christ. In addressing the Corinthians, a group overly confident of their spiritual maturity, Paul notes that this state of being perfect will come not as a product of human growth and knowledge, but only when we come to see God, or perfect love, “face to face”

(13:12). Nearing the end of his own life, Paul emphasizes to the citizens of Philippi and Colossae that God will bring the completion, perfection, *telos* in the “day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6, Col. 1:28)—a phrase that signifies not so much coming in time (that is, in the last days) as much as security, as in what *The Women's Study Bible* calls “the keeping power of God in salvation.”

While few psychological studies conduct research using perfection and persons with religious commitments as variables, one several decades old sheds some light on the connection between attitudes related to perfection and the unhealthy tension that expectations of its immediacy can foster. Larry A. Hjelle and James Lomastro (*Scientific Study of Religion*, Spring 1971) demonstrate that for certain Catholic seminarians and religious sisters, attitudes of dogmatism relate significantly to personality characteristics indicative of anxiety. These researchers describe individuals in the group labeled “High Dogmatism” as having attitudes reminiscent of Markham and Sofield's cornucopia kids: they are less able to be “tolerant of ambiguities and uncertainties,” admit to more behaviors characterizing socially alienated persons, and are less willing to admit to “having feelings or symptoms indicative of anxiety.” Their findings show that the subjects of their study score in the direction predicted, with those high in dogmatism showing significantly more religious conventionality and anxiety but rating lower in autonomy than those low in dogmatism.

The paradox in this study, and in life itself, is that the persons most open to admitting their struggles, questions, and fears are those more open to processes that will ensure growth as religious believers. The perfectionist, like the high dogmatist, is one who cannot admit to mistakes, questions, doubts, or personal limitations. It takes a certain vision of self that is willing to see the flaws, to accept being good enough, to open up room for God to enter in. Again, an irony exists: for the overgratified cornucopia kids, what lies at the center of their need for others to satisfy them is a lack of self-worth and a sense of emptiness. Ana-Maria Rizzuto, in her book *Birth of the Living God*, points out that such persons often view God as either distant or split into good and bad.

AVOIDING FOCUS ON PERFECTION

Religion and formation programs for the young in religious life can offer resources to move cornucopia kids who are not too fixed in their perfectionistic, isolated, narcissistic styles into ways more conducive to healthy relating to God and community. However, doing so means allowing spiritual formation to be

as much about living with the questions as providing the answers. Writing in the *Journal of Religion and Health* (Winter 1990) on his work with seminary students, Kevin Fauteux notes:

Religion cannot be satisfied with complacent security, with satisfaction of childish needs, with rituals that allay anxiety but do not create self-understanding, or with religious experiences that are splendidly cathartic but do not lead to greater comprehension. Religion needs to challenge people, to bring them face to face with their fears and their strengths. It needs to help people find in their belief in God the personal courage and conviction to live a healthy life.

The first step is to open young people to an awareness of what images of God guide and direct their spiritual life and influence their moral judgments. Is their image of God split, with the divine held up as good and Satan or some other demonic figure as evil? As right as that might seem in some sense, any marked division into all black and white suggests an infantile approach to morality. Then we need to ask to what degree the image of God is abstract or concrete, and how near or distant it is. In an adult, an image of God as a kindly, almost Santa-like personage with a long beard and glowing robe suggests a failure to develop a mature level of ability to form abstractions. Such oversimplification also suggests an orientation to significant relationships based essentially on need satisfaction, without much capacity to see others in the relationship—human or divine—in any other terms. Finally, images of God in which the person sees a merging or duality that mirrors the individual points in the direction of narcissism. As Gertrude and Rubin Blanck write in *Ego Psychology: Theory and Practice*, a certain degree of idealization of the One we worship is normal, but idealizations that suggest a projection of grandiosity or a reflection of omniscience or omnipotence are potential hazards and warning signs of marked self-focus and dysfunctionality.

In their article warning formation personnel to “guard against the cornucopia syndrome,” Markham and Sofield address the drain that can come when the director or directress is the person targeted to fill the needs that affected individuals bring with them. The authors encourage directors to use their own peer support to provide personal resources in their work with these young people. They also note that the major forces for change within these individuals,

if change can happen, include “models and challenge.” Obviously, the formation person is the central model to a life in which self-giving is valued over self-gratification, commitment is possible, and holiness comes with relationship, not perfection.

If I were sitting with the sister newly assigned to formation ministry today, I might share with her all these thoughts. I might also tell her of a person whose death I read about in early December last year. A son of parents who had never finished grade school, this African American from Upper Darby, outside Philadelphia, earned a master's degree and served as a two-star army general. Before his untimely death from leukemia at age 60, he had risen to the rank of superintendent of the Seattle schools. In a position often fraught with conflict and resounding with criticism, John Henry Sanford somehow won admiration as he brought credibility, efficiency, and results to a once largely troubled school system. When anyone—from vice presidents to pupils in hallways, from diplomats to potential dropouts—greeted John Sanford with the usual “Hi, John/Mr. Sanford, how are you?” they would receive his standard and startling reply: “Perfect and still improving.” With this simple paradox, this man epitomized his whole philosophy of life—one that said anything is possible, but not now. All good can happen, but in God's time, not mine.

RECOMMENDED READING

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- Patterson, D., and R. Kelley. *The Women's Study Bible*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1995.



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Empowering Tomorrow's Laity

Catherine M. Harmer, M.M.S., Ph.D.

Over the past few years, I have often been asked to speak to groups of associates of religious congregations around the country. My own group began an associate organization in the mid-seventies. Most of the original group of interested people were former members and sometimes their spouses. During the several years that the idea was discussed, debated, accepted, and then promoted, one key concept was central for us: we did not want to create merely an alumnae organization, a way for former members to stay in touch. That was possible for us without an associate program. What many of us sensed was that there was more to the concept than we might immediately understand. There was a perception that this could have potential for the future of the church rather than simply for the religious congregation. That belief was one of the moving forces for many of us during all the meeting, talking, and thinking.

There are many different understandings of what it means to be an associate of a religious congregation. For some it means being part of a group of people who are bound to the congregation mainly by prayer. One community I know of has a "prayer partners" group, the members of which are considered associates. The hundreds of people in this group commit themselves to praying for the sisters and their ministries. This commitment to prayer is the limit of their involvement and their obligation.

Other groups are committed to the financial support of the congregation. Like the prayer groups, these "benefactors" groups have a simple but very useful role in supporting the religious. Many of the members have been supporting the religious congregation for years and receive regular newsletters from the congregation. This is basically a fundraising use of the concept of association and, in most cases, predates the advent of associate programs.

Many associate programs go beyond the alumnae concept, as well as the prayer and donation roles. These are the ones on which I want to focus, because I believe that they have potential beyond the religious group to which they are affiliated. These programs, which I consider to be true associate programs, are made up of people who make a formal commitment related to the mission and ministry of a congregation. The members of these programs promise to live their lives, both personal and professional, with the mission of the religious congregation as a significant part of who they are and what they do. Usually, they are attracted to a particular congregation because of its ministries or public commitment to certain causes (e.g., healing, social justice). The commitments of associates begin as limited ones, but in a number of groups, a lifetime commitment is possible. In my community, acceptance into associate status is approved by the provincial council, recognizing that this is a serious

and important part of the life of our religious community.

ATTRACTIONS FOR LAITY

I am convinced that two major forces move people toward these programs. One is the strong desire of many laypeople for a deeper spiritual life that will influence how they live and work. This is frequently the initial pressure that moves them. Several years after we started our associate program, I was having supper with a friend and his wife. We had been graduate students together in a doctoral program, and when we finished made a commitment to stay in touch. Whenever we got together, Andy always asked, "What are you reading?" The question was never about psychology; he wanted to know what I was reading in the realm of spirituality and theology. This time as I sat there, stunned once again by his question, I realized that while our associate program had started several years earlier, I had never told Andy and Suzanne about it.

As I talked about the program, who was part of it, and what the commitment meant, they listened intently. Then Suzanne reached over, grasped my hand, and asked how they could join. Our orientation program is individualized and usually takes about a year. The following year, both made their promises, which they have renewed over the years. What was attractive to them was being connected with a group—represented by both the community and its associates—that was committed to living a spiritual life in the world, with a dedication to bringing about social justice and change. Like most of our associates, they are not interested in getting involved in our internal affairs, such as governance and the election of leaders. They want to touch into the life of the spirit, to be part of a group whose members challenge one another in terms of how they are living their lives as Christians who believe the gospel mandates. They open themselves to the same scrutiny through membership in a regional group of our sisters, who meet quarterly. Both are professionals in the healing arts, and the same issues that move our sisters are prominent in their professional life as well as their family life. Like many of our associates, they bring the rich reality of being married and professional into our discussions. Their children have also become a significant part of this life we share.

I am convinced that the second force at the crux of the associate movement is the growth of understanding of the potential role of the laity in the church. Many associates learned a great deal from Vatican Council II about the laity—that "sleeping giant" that is no longer asleep. Especially among educated Catholics, there are many who want a

greater role in the church but do not find it to any significant extent in the parishes. Religious congregations are often a way into more involvement in the life of the church at a broader level. For those Catholics who do not find a rich life in their parishes, association with a religious congregation is a way to remain part of the church while being actively involved in a variety of things that are not open to them otherwise. My two friends eventually found their way to an inner-city parish in Camden, New Jersey, where they could be involved in parish life while maintaining their active involvement in the associate world.

Many religious congregations, especially at central houses, have become places where laity who are interested in a richer liturgical experience find a "home." They may come occasionally, or they may have made the sisters' chapel their alternative parish, so that they are there every Sunday; some even come during the week. Part of me worries a bit about this aspect of both the associate programs and regular attendance at chapels. We have had fairly steady, though changing, attendance at our district center by a significant number of laypeople. During the late sixties they were attracted by lively "folk" masses with lots of musical instruments, excellent homilies, and good participation. Over the years, the group has changed somewhat; the liturgies are still good, but with less emphasis on the folk element; and the homilies vary, as we no longer have a resident chaplain. I am pleased that people have found a place to worship. However, as one who has committed to the parish in which we live, I am concerned that people, by choosing an alternative, are not working to change things in their parishes.

For many people, however, the problem is exactly there. They believe, often accurately, that there is no opportunity to make any changes in their parish. The lack of life in many parishes, and the reluctance of some pastors to allow lay involvement beyond the collection plate and the parish benefits, has led to people opting out of the parish and finding alternative solutions. Not all of those who attend our Sunday liturgies are associates. Indeed, most are not. However, for those associates who live near enough to come, attendance at the liturgy is an experience that feeds their spiritual life.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON CHURCH

The great potential of associate programs lies not so much in a revitalization of religious congregations, which was an early hope for some, but in a renewal of the spiritual life and power of the laity. More than anything else, I believe that associate programs will eventually have an impact on the church itself. A

laity that is informed, aware of social questions, immersed in a spirituality that comes out of Jesus' mission to reach out to the poor and the neglected (Luke 4:16–22), and supported by religious and clergy can be in a very strong position to make an impact on the church itself. This may be especially true in the coming years, with the decline in the numbers of priests in the parishes, and the consequent reduction of the numbers of parishes.

There is a tendency to blame the decrease in vocations to the priesthood on parents who do not encourage their children, on young people who are too concerned about the things of this world, even on priests and religious who do not work hard enough for "vocation promotion." All of these may be factors—but it may also be that the power of God is at work, aiming toward a greater empowerment of the laity. In the past, religious and clergy have too often looked to laity only when there were not enough priests and sisters. There are many possible explanations for the current decline in vocations. It is important not to leave out of the equation the power and action of God.

I believe that religious life will survive and that the numbers of religious might even grow again at some time in the future. I also believe that the church will have people to serve its people in the future. However, I do not believe that large numbers of religious and clergy are essential to the future life of the church. We have the most educated and committed laity possibly in the history of the church, and we need to be able to encourage their involvement.

REVITALIZATION OF PARISHES

It is quite possible that the associate movement will have more to do with the development of the church itself than with the support of religious congregations. Associate programs have the potential to be increasingly powerful in the future. Rather than, or in addition to, furthering the work of religious congregations, they could be a bridge to a revitalized parish life within the church. We are seeing signs of this around the world. We are also experiencing a reactionary backlash against lay involvement in some aspects of the life of the church. However, it was once said that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"; perhaps a new kind of "martyr" is seeding the coming church of the third millennium.

Associate programs provide a space and a support for laity who would like to be more involved, who are seeking a deeper spiritual life and a commitment to the mission of the church in the world, today and in the future. Religious need to think about this as they initiate or continue associate programs.

If we look at associates as a way to "save" the religious congregation, we may be missing the point of the association. If our former members are using the program merely as a way to be part of the congregation again, they are missing the point. Associates can and should get help, support, and spiritual sustenance from their membership. Religious can accept associates as partners in their mission, and even in their ministries, but not see them as "semireligious." The partnering between religious and associates should be one that aims at the future of the church and its life. It can be a very rich connection, personally and communally. It can also help to bring about a renewed church in the next millennium. At some point—and in some parishes, such as the one in Camden, where Andy and Suzanne worship—the ability and willingness to contribute to the local church could be a key element in the commitment associates make.

As we move toward the third millennium, there is a growing sense that we are entering into a new age of the Spirit—an age that would depend on the impact of a laity that is mature in its faith and immersed in a spirituality that is both God-centered and mission-directed. The Spirit has used many vessels in the past two millennia. It is possible that in the coming age, newly empowered and self-aware laypeople, some of whom have been nurtured and supported in associate programs, will be a major force for carrying on the work of the church. With fewer religious and clergy—the "professionals" of the church—the role of the laity could grow and be fruitful in a new way in a new age. If this happens, religious congregations, even if smaller, can continue to be a base of support for the laity. This would be a new and vital way for religious to exercise the power they have always had—a power dependent not on numbers but on vision and commitment. As religious congregations in the past have been pioneers in the areas of education, health care, and social services, so now they may be the real pioneers in the growing empowerment of laity. It is a good and noble service to the church.



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Last Call for Religious Life

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Within weeks of Joseph Bernardin's death from cancer, physician Ellen Gaynor, O.P., had this to say about the man: "I found early on that I was strongly drawn to him." The doctor, who attended the late Archbishop of Chicago during his final illness, faced a dilemma, though, as she struggled to put her finger on just what it was that drew her so quickly to the Cardinal. Was it his kind and gentle nature, sharp mind, or quick wit that she found so attractive? Eventually, Gaynor realized that some entirely different qualities caused Bernardin to stand out from so many of her other patients: his honesty, courage, and great faith. "After all," she said, "he asked only that I be honest with him."

Gaynor's last encounter with the Cardinal says it all: "When I saw him on the Friday before his death, I told him that he would die before Christmas. He said simply, 'I am ready.' I promised him also that I would tell him when he was very close to death, and when I saw him three days later, there had been rapid deterioration. So I said to him, 'You are very close—you will die this week. Are you OK with this?' To which he replied, 'If it must be, I am ready.' Inner peace such as that displayed by Joseph Bernardin does not just happen; it has to be nurtured over a lifetime."

The Cardinal's life and death remind us that personal witness can still be a powerful tool for

promoting church vocations. Consider, for example, the extraordinary news coverage during the days preceding and following his death, and the reactions to the publication of his memoir, *The Gift of Peace*, as well as the subsequent appearance of many other books about his life and ministry. Delivering the eulogy at Bernardin's funeral, Monsignor Ken Vello described the Cardinal's life as a remarkable human and spiritual adventure. Those listening to his words could only agree. Sisters, priests, and brothers in the United States today share Joseph Bernardin's hopes and dreams, as well as his concern for our church and the world. Their lives, however, differ from his in one significant way: whereas the late Cardinal's identity as a church minister was clear and apparent, theirs often is not. Simply put, many contemporary American men and women religious are invisible, but everyone knew that Joseph Bernardin was, first and foremost, a priest. Lack of visibility is but one obstacle that U.S. religious will have to overcome if they are ever to revitalize their mission and way of life, and address the vocation crisis that exists in our country today. They will face some formidable challenges in tackling this last task: membership in religious congregations is about half what it was during the late 1960s. The numbers of new entrants into programs of

formation are also but a fraction of those of just three decades ago.

This article examines the alarming thirty-year decline in vocations to religious life among young U.S. Catholics and identifies some of the now-familiar explanations for this troubling situation. More important, it makes a number of recommendations about how the church community as a whole can reverse this trend. God continues to call young American Catholics to religious life. Sisters, priests, brothers, members of the laity, and church hierarchy—all have a role to play in helping these young people respond courageously to that invitation. Do we really have a vocation crisis on our hands? From a purely secular point of view, no organization can continue to carry out its mission effectively if it fails to attract new members and retain current ones. The majority of today's U.S. religious congregations fail on both counts.

As troubling as current statistics are, however, the strange passivity seen in the face of them is even more disturbing. Despite their great good will, a number of American men and women religious appear overwhelmed by the challenges they face in the area of vocation promotion. Many, for example, insist that they lack the skills necessary for working and talking with young people and inviting them to join religious life. "Leave these tasks," they urge, "to those who have a talent for them." Others fall back on popular explanations for the current lack of candidates: fewer children in families, greater individualism and materialism among the young, difficulty with permanent commitments, church directives about the role of women in its life and mission, the greater number of career choices available to young people. As a possible cause for the decline in church vocations, still others cite recent news stories about the arrest and conviction of priests and brothers on charges of child sexual abuse. Who can disagree with them? There exists today sufficient evidence that reports about these cases are indeed causing parents, and a number of men and women religious themselves, to discourage vocations to religious life. More than a few priests, sisters, and brothers ask whether it is just to invite a young man or woman to a way of life that appears to have so completely lost its way. Others, convinced that their way of life is dying, lose themselves in professional pursuits; over time, their congregations become less and less of a reference point. None of these responses is particularly helpful to those who wish to address the challenge of vocation promotion in our church today.

VOCATION CRISIS

There can be no doubt that we have a vocation crisis on our hands, and it is no wonder. Most of us

have failed, since Vatican II, to take serious and sustained action to reverse the membership decline in our congregations. Just ask yourself this question: What have I done lately, in a personal way, to promote even one vocation to my religious family or to another? For many of us, the answer is simple: nothing. The challenge, in responding to the current crisis in vocations, is twofold: to make some sense of it and to develop strategies for addressing it. Today, a number of commentators employ a medical model to explain the lack of young men and women in novitiates, comparing religious life to a terminally ill patient. The time has come, they suggest, to settle the poor soul's debts, distribute its remaining assets, ensure the care of its aged members, and let this way of life die with dignity. We can console ourselves in our loss, they insist, with the hope that someday in the future, religious life will emerge once again and find its way.

Other theorists offer a more hopeful interpretation of the facts. They agree that the vocation scene is a bleak one but suggest that the solution to our current dilemma lies, in part, in a return to many of religious life's past practices. The majority of priests, sisters, and brothers in the United States, however, doubt that this approach will give rise to a realistic plan of action with which to address the formidable challenge of vocation promotion today.

Suppose, for a moment, that we adopt a third and alternative model to analyze the current vocation crisis and to develop some strategies for addressing it. Let's compare present-day American priests, sisters, and brothers to a group of missionaries setting out to live among the people of a certain village and engage in the work of evangelization. At the outset, these missionaries neither know the language of the villagers nor understand much about their culture. Feeling inadequate to the task that faces them, they accept that they have a lot to learn. Since their group is small, the missionaries realize too that, from the very beginning, they must give priority to recruiting new members from among the people of the village. What can these missionaries do to prepare themselves? First of all, they can learn the language of the people they are called to serve. Next, they can work to understand and appreciate their culture. Finally, they can pledge to put aside a significant amount of their time for the work of vocation promotion. The missionaries agree to all three tasks, pledging especially to apportion 20 percent of their best time to the work of promoting vocations. Why 20 percent? The group members know that if they fail to devote significant time to recruiting new members, they won't have a future and, quite honestly, won't deserve one. Could not the same observation be made

about the majority of religious congregations in the United States today? Or is this an oversimplification?

A number of people may be offended by the seemingly simplistic and mechanical approach to vocation promotion on the part of our imaginary missionaries. "What about the action of the Holy Spirit?" they will ask. "Isn't God the source of all church vocations?" In recent years, appealing to the action of the Holy Spirit and citing God as the source of church vocations have, for some, become excuses for contributing little, if anything, to the hard work of securing new members for religious congregations. God's action is a given in this area. Human effort, however, is equally important; it continues to call young men and women to religious life today. Priests, sisters, and brothers can play an important role in fostering calls by creating within their congregations and church a climate that promotes vocations—one that forces us to face some fundamental life questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?

American women and men religious are serious about helping young people listen to God's call and encouraging vocations to their way of life, though they will need to do more than foster a congregational and ecclesial culture that promotes them. They must also be missionaries to the group first referred to by novelist Douglas Coupland as "Generation X," or "Xers." The majority of today's midlife religious neither speak this group's language nor understand its culture and worldview. But there is no doubt that, like the missionaries mentioned earlier, middle-aged sisters, brothers, and priests can both develop these skills and choose to dedicate a significant amount of their best time—20 percent—to the work of vocation promotion.

Today, however, they must answer this larger question: Do they have the will to do all three? Let's assume that they do. To help them learn the language of Xers and understand their culture, we'll need to put on the hat of an anthropologist for a short while and set out to visit the land of Generation X. As we do so, let's also try to find some answers to these three questions: Who are these people? What do they think about contemporary religious life? What are they asking of it?

GENERATION X

Were you on hand for the home delivery of your family's first television set? Do you have an answer to this question: "Where were you when John F. Kennedy was shot?" Were the Sunday evenings of your childhood made memorable because of radio programs like "The Shadow" and "The Lone

Ranger"? Do the phrases "Catonsville Nine," "Berri-gan brothers," and "Kent State" make any sense to you? Can you recall the Latin mass, Saturday afternoon confession, Sodality, Vatican II, a pontiff known as "Good Pope John," and a fast before communion that started at midnight? If you have answered yes to more than one or two of these questions, rest assured: there is little chance that you are a member of Generation X.

Now try your hand at defining some of the following terms: "Beavis and Butthead," break dancing, rap, *Wired*, valley girl, *Tron*, 2 Live Crew, *Reality Bites*, Duran Duran, Leif Garrett, *E.T.*, Atari, safe sex, Swatch, and Tori Amos. For any self-respecting Xer, these phrases, and many others like them, are part and parcel of his or her working vocabulary.

Fundamentally different sets of experiences have shaped the worldviews of contemporary midlife U.S. religious and the emerging generation of young Catholics who might follow them. If religious life is to have a future, then priests, sisters, and brothers must come to know well the men and women of Generation X—the most important source of potential candidates for their congregations.

Born between 1961 and 1981, Xers have picked up various contradictory descriptions and labels along the way. Alternately referred to as pragmatic and pathetic, quick and confused, sharp-eyed and unfocused, self-centered and able to step outside themselves and understand just how the world works, they make up the largest and the most culturally and ethnically diverse collection of men and women in American history. No single type of music, hero, or style of clothing defines them. Considering all that's been written recently about Generation X, we must, at the outset, admit that current descriptions of this group are problematic for a number of reasons. Yes, they are the thirteenth generation to know the U.S. flag and Constitution and thus, predictably, have come to be known as "Thirteeners." They also number about eighty million, come in all sizes and shapes, and appear to be more tolerant of diversity than previous generations.

Much of what has been written about Xers, though, tends to focus on a group of upwardly mobile young men and women who enjoy a certain degree of economic advantage. Their working-class and poorer brothers and sisters of all races and ethnicities are notably absent from the discussion. Vocations to religious life and priesthood have, in the past, come primarily from among the families of the latter two groups. More effort needs to be made, therefore, to understand the hopes, dreams, fears, concerns, and beliefs of contemporary young poor and working-class Catholics. With this caution in mind, let's take

a look at what is being said generally about Thirteeners.

In spite of their differences, Xers do share a common history, and it has shaped their outlook on life. They are, for example, the first generation of Americans whom other people took pills not to have. From the very beginning of their lives, this message was passed along to them: children are avoidable or, in the case of abortion, disposable. The workaholism and insatiable drive for career advancement and economic success displayed by their midlife sisters and brothers have further convinced many Thirteeners that the well-being of children does not rank high among the priorities of an older generation. They are noted for delaying life commitments and looking for a world and a church that will not shift beneath their feet. Is it any wonder? Many were "latchkey" children: during their growing-up years, large numbers of these men and women spent more time with the family's television set than with the family itself. Because their busy working parents expected them to care for younger siblings, a number of Xers took on adult responsibilities at an earlier age than normal. All these experiences helped shape their attitudes toward family, relationships, and life commitments.

So did the fact that Thirteeners paid the price for America's divorce epidemic. During their childhoods, they witnessed the collapse of traditional family structures. Back in 1962, half of all adults agreed that people in bad marriages should stay together for the sake of the children; by 1980 less than a fifth held that opinion. America's divorce rate doubled between the years 1965 and 1975. Over time, then, the men and women of Generation X came to define family without relying on biological ties. For the vast majority of them, relationships rather than blood connections lie at the heart of this social institution. Most Thirteeners feel that the people with whom you have day-to-day contact and share meaningful conversations and a sense of closeness constitute family. They trust their friendships over all other relationships.

Xers want life commitments that will last and are taking their time before settling down. One young man of twenty put it this way: "My father left us when I was eleven. In retrospect, I can see now that it was all very adolescent on his part: a new life, a new wife, and a new car. What about my mother, though, and my brothers and sisters, and me; didn't he care about what happened to us? His leaving continues to have its effects, even now, nine years later. It takes me time, for example, to trust people. I ask myself, 'Can I depend on this person? Will this relationship weather difficult times?' I can't take a chance on life until I am absolutely sure of the ground on which I am standing."

American men and women religious who are serious about helping young people listen to God's call must become missionaries to the group known as "Generation X"

They are a skeptical bunch: the life experience of Xers has taught them to be suspect of institutions. At the same time, they long for a world in which people and institutions are who or what they say they are. This apparent contradiction is not surprising. After all, they had their first civics lesson in 1973, watching the Watergate hearings on television. Thirteeners regard the 1970s as their ideological home. What did that decade teach them? First of all, to be cynical about grownups more skilled at discussing than solving problems. Next, to wonder about an adult world that expressed moral ambivalence when an emerging generation sought clear answers, and hesitated to impose some structure on the behavior of young people. Finally, to question a worldview that tolerated a rising torrent of pathology and negativism that was swamping the daily lives of young men and women.

A number of business and political scandals coincided with the Xers' coming of age and further fueled their skepticism, including the savings and loan scandal and the Iran-Contra affair. As Thirteeners grew into adulthood, the national debt mounted, and incidents of theft and violent crime multiplied quickly. In 1980 the men and women of Generation X cast their first vote, mostly for Ronald Reagan. Their academic careers as university students coincided with the publication of the report entitled *A Nation at Risk*, warning that education in the United States was beset by

a “rising tide of mediocrity.” A number of institutions of public life, then, appeared to be fraudulent and dysfunctional. Eventually, many Thirteeners grew distrustful of such institutions and decided that they merited neither their respect nor confidence.

Xers also have an antipathy toward social movements. What lies behind this aversion is their opposition to the sixties idealism of their older brothers and sisters. Young people of the 1960s won many gains for those who previously had no voice. The decade failed, however, to achieve its promises. One generation’s gains eventually became the losses of another. With their high ideals, baby boomers (born between 1943 and 1960) undertook organized social actions—but with what results for the generation that followed? An AIDS epidemic rather than sexual liberation; nuclear anxiety rather than peace; skyrocketing college tuitions instead of low-cost education. Xers quickly came to the conclusion that they had been left with a culture in crisis.

If Thirteeners were invited to stop for a moment and encouraged to view our world and offer some comment on what they saw, they might pass along the following observation and at least one piece of advice. The observation? Their generation appears to be the clean-up crew of this century: whatever consequences America must face, they’ll bear the brunt of it. Thirteeners have discovered already, for example, that it will be much harder for them to get ahead than it was for their parents. The piece of advice? Contemporary U.S. society needs to put aside its ideological positions and name-calling and let simple things work again. Perhaps this very same message has some applicability to our church and religious life as well.

TECHNOLOGY AND GENERATION X

Without question, stunning advances in technology over the past quarter century have had a significant and lasting impact on the character of Thirteeners. Midlife baby boomers might remember delivery of their family’s first television set; most Xers cannot imagine a household without two or three of them. Television gave Thirteeners a window on a rapidly unfolding visual culture and changed the way in which they acquired information. Many appear to read less, for example, yet seem to know a great deal more, than did boomers at their age. The daily newspaper, once an almost universal source of information about local and world events, has been supplanted in many homes by television entertainment-news, complete with sound bites and carefully crafted visual images. Raised with television, Xers were over time introduced to a host of other electronic gadgets: calculators, remote-control

devices, boom boxes, videocassette recorders, and digital cassette players, to name but a few. With the birth of the television music channel known as MTV, video also began to imitate reality; alongside real life grew its imitation. A world of popular culture eventually took shape and assumed a number of additional forms: cartoons, comics, clothing, fantasy games, and the music and concerts of the young.

Advances in technology gave rise to an information explosion unprecedented in human history. Networking with their contemporaries worldwide, Thirteeners became vicarious participants in the massacre at Tiananmen Square and were “present” at the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over time, many of them began to develop an understanding about the political world’s instability; unfortunately, they did not gain a concomitant sense of hope about that world. Personal computers dropped in price sharply as Xers came of age, and skill in using them became the preoccupation of a generation. The personal computer has probably had more recent influence on Thirteeners than any other technological advance. They have spent hours playing computer games, “surfing the Net,” visiting Internet chat rooms, downloading information, and sending and receiving e-mail. The Internet is their second home, and there has been no limit to what they have been able to find there.

GENERATION X AND THE CHURCH

The skepticism that Xers harbor toward institutions carries over to their attitudes toward the church. Unfortunately, many of the faithful, with the responsibility for doing so, have failed in recent years to pass on the best aspects of their spiritual heritage. If report cards were issued to measure the effectiveness of Catholic religious education over the past three decades, a number of midlife church ministers would be troubled by the grades they received. In general, Xers don’t take well to conventional religious institutions and prepackaged pieties. They have a deep and abiding suspicion of both. Official “Christianity” has, in their minds, become too bound up with U.S. middle-class culture. Has the gospel’s radical message been sacrificed, they wonder, so that the dreams of middle-class white Americans can take precedence? Xers want to reclaim Jesus from the very institutions that claim to minister in his name. At the same time, a significant number of the men and women of this generation lack knowledge of many of the basic dogmas of the Catholic faith. Most are doctrinally and historically illiterate when it comes to Catholic tradition; have a conversation with any number of them and you’ll discover quickly that they are neither Catechism nor Council Catholics.

Reflecting on her experience as a Holy Cross College theology professor, for example, Mary Ann Hindale, I.H.M., remarked in a recent interview, "You can't assume any kind of cultural background, even with Catholic students, so you begin from ground zero. I didn't think, when I got into this twenty years ago, that I was going to be a missionary." As if offering support for her observation, many religious congregations today require the few candidates they do have to participate in a local Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program early in the process of formation.

Xers are not angry with the Catholic church, though—just strangely indifferent toward it. They neither feel guilty about sex nor harbor bad memories of a Catholic school childhood. As a consequence, the fury that some men and women religious direct at the church perplexes them. Why would people remain part of an organization, they wonder, that appears to cause them so much pain and anguish? Rather than hear about what men and women religious no longer believe, Xers would rather learn about what they still hold dear.

GENERATION X AND SPIRITUALITY

Surprisingly ignorant about many matters of faith and theology, Xers are neither irreligious nor indifferent toward spirituality. The key to their relationship with God, however, will not be found in the traditional places. Thirteeners have been forced to search for the fundamentals of their faith in the midst of profound theological, social, personal, and sexual ambiguities. If you want to learn something about their religious interests, hopes, fears and desires, look to their movies, popular songs, MTV, board games, cyberspace, and television shows. While spiritually hungry, Xers appear also to be taking their time as they search for a set of deeper human values. They are willing to wait for a credible and authentic vision of life and, indeed, desire one that is compelling and challenging. They hope, too, that when they come across it, some practical guidelines will be included for living it out. Young people are looking for a challenge in this area—one that is demanding as well as inviting and adventurous. Simply put, they long for something that will light their fire, ignite within them a passion for life. A rediscovery of genuine Christian tradition, rather than traditionalism, may be a first step toward satisfying their hunger.

Xers ultimately have a yearning, both implicit and explicit, for an almost mystical encounter with the human and the divine. They find the religious more readily in personal experience and regard their own experience as superior to the accounts of others or truths handed down by way of creed or custom.

GENERATION X AND THEIR ELDERS

Years ago, the generation now in midlife was fond of offering this straightforward advice: Don't trust anyone over thirty. Today, in a strange role reversal, this very same generation has shifted the focus of its mistrust to the men and women who have come to be known as Xers. Noticeable tension exists between a number of boomers and their younger brothers and sisters. Xers, though, are not a totally uniform lot. Those born on the frontier of Thirteener territory, for example, often identify with some of the concerns and the worldview of the older generation. That said, however, it's also true that many midlifers judge Thirteeners to be a disappointing bunch: ill-informed, intellectually dull, politically inactive, religiously conservative, and hopelessly materialistic. "Can they find Denver on a map?" asked one boomer.

Some Xers fear that a number of contemporary midlifers are redefining every test of idealism in a way guaranteed to make members of their generation fail. Over time, many of them have made judgments about their elders, classifying a number of them as nothing more than self-righteous ideologues. Most Thirteeners would be delighted never to have to read yet another commemorative article about Woodstock, Kent State, or Vatican II. They have grown tired of hearing their forebears take credit for things they believe their elders did not do: invent rock and roll, start the civil rights movement, stop the war in Vietnam, reform the Catholic church singlehandedly with Vatican II. The vast majority of Thirteeners question the self-perception of a number of boomers that they and their middle-aged compatriots have been the most creative, idealistic, morally conscious generation in the history of the nation and church, if not the world. Thirteeners would welcome a little generational humility from their elders; the majority, though, have given up hope of seeing any.

RELIGIOUS AND THIRTEENERS

Some contemporary midlife men and women religious have been equally unkind to the Thirteeners in their midst, labeling them as reactionary and religiously conservative. Their presence in the congregation is, at times, experienced by some as a threat to the hard-won changes in community life, prayer, and choice of ministry seen over the past four decades. So great is the suspicion about Xers among a few midlife priests, sisters, and brothers, that they would go so far as to risk the future of the mission of their congregations rather than admit a significant number of them to membership. Xers in religious life find their situation equally oppressive. To begin with, for most

Sad to say, some young Catholics will tell you that their chief source of discouragement about entering religious life is a particular priest, sister, or brother

Thirteeners, Vatican II is other people's history. They experienced neither the preconciliar church nor its religious life. They tire too of being classified as conservative and reactionary when it comes to church teachings and issues surrounding religious life. One young priest, for example, reported frustration with the reaction of his midlife confreres to his criticism of the steps they took after the Council to renew their congregation. "It's sad," he said; "They don't even realize that they threw out the baby with the bath water." A 35-year-old woman religious reported similar frustration. She framed her dilemma using these words: "I just don't sense in my congregation a movement toward a greater commitment to community, and I need that. I used to think that I was screwed up or somehow lacked personal identity because I wanted community so badly. After all, some of my midlife sisters in the community accused me of being a "1950s wannabe." Now, though, I am beginning to sense that it is okay to want to share my life with others who have the same passion as I have, and who are not all older than my mother."

Young people considering religious life today are looking for two things: a common life and a vibrant spirituality. They don't need to be a sister, priest, or brother to do ministry; many of them are doing it already through their involvement in volunteer movements, parish outreach programs, work as Catholic school teachers, and a variety of other ministries. What encourages them to pursue their interest in religious life? Seeing happy and hopeful men and

women religious—people who truly are Good News—and the experience of hospitality extended to them by priests, sisters, and brothers. At a recent conference on religious life, one young participant put it this way to the religious in the audience: "Open your hearts as well as your homes."

Xers with an interest in religious life want to be part of something larger than themselves and to live their lives in a way that makes a difference. They long to give themselves to something that demands passion and commitment. Similarly put, Xers interested in religious life today want to take seriously what it means to follow Jesus: to serve God in a radical way—a way that can happen only if they serve together with others. Most would agree that community can be lived out in a variety of ways. Thirteeners, though, want to share a life together, in more than a casual way, with others who have the same vision and values; they desire to be part of a community in which mutual concern, support, and a life of prayer are the foundation of its ministry. Those considering religious life as a vocation want to talk about Jesus and about prayer, faith, and what it means to have a relationship with God that demands sacrifice. They are confused when they find some men and women religious strangely silent on these topics. Most especially, they want a religious life that demands something of them. If a Thirteeners is going to join a religious community, what that congregation stands for must be worth his or her life. The life experiences of Xers, in general, have left them with two unanswered questions: Who needs me? What can I contribute? Without a doubt, they are looking for community and a sense of belonging. They long, too, for a simple lifestyle and some means for expressing their care for the world. Many, in short, are searching for something that will give their life meaning. We used to call that something "the sacred."

Ask young Catholics why Xers aren't joining religious life today. Some will tell you that celibacy is the problem. Many wonder if it is a healthy choice; others don't want to pass up the chance for a life-long committed relationship with another person and a family. The media will also be mentioned. As noted earlier, the press on religious life has not been very positive of late. Sad to say, some young Catholics will tell you that their chief source of discouragement about entering religious life is a particular priest, sister, or brother. You'll be told, too, that men and women religious are invisible in the daily lives of the young or known more by the myths, stereotypes, and television caricatures based on their way of life. Fear of permanent commitments will get honorable mention. Young Catholics will also point out that parental support for entering religious life is just not

there anymore; neither is the encouragement of friends. Whereas, in the past, a certain prestige surrounded entrance into a novitiate, today many people express dismay when a young person announces such a decision: “Why would anyone want to do that with his or her life?” is a typical response.

Men and women religious mirror similar attitudes when asked to identify congregations’ greatest obstacles to, or challenges in, inviting and sustaining new members. They cite lack of corporate identity; failure to be visible; lack of pride on the part of religious in who they are; inability to change and accept differences; lack of hospitality; religious who are too busy, overextended, or tired; tensions in the church; and failure to invite young people to join.

What do young sisters, priests, and brothers have to add to the discussion when it comes to observations about contemporary religious life? First of all, hardly perfect people themselves, they assure us that they are not looking for congregations of taintless souls. Second, ask them what attracted them to their institutes, and you’ll hear the following: the group’s clarity of vision, a common life, ministries that respond to absolute human needs, a common focus, and the fact that the gospel message and a life of prayer are the foundation for the group’s life and work together. They believe that this way of life was meant to make its members happy and can do just that. Like some other young people of their generation, they believe that men and women religious are called to be the Good News. In the eyes of young sisters, brothers, and priests, then, religious life in the United States today potentially has something very positive going for it. Unfortunately, a number of other people appear to have missed out on that bit of news. Our collective challenge? To let the church community and the nation in on what is apparently one of contemporary Catholicism’s best kept secrets.

VOCATIONS: FIRST THINGS FIRST

Patricia Wittberg reminds us that four incentives fostered vocations in years past: a personal invitation; the enthusiasm and support of family, clergy, and members of the wider parish; the benefits of the life itself; and those “funnels” of new candidates that every congregation somehow managed to organize. She points out also that these incentives have been seriously diminished in recent years. In some congregations they have disappeared altogether.

Whether they set out to revive some of these incentives or to develop a set of new ones, U.S. men and women religious would do well to make some fundamental decisions about their way of life. These include the resolve to establish a regular rhythm of

prayer for vocations, to clarify the identity and mission of their religious institutes, to begin once again to invite young people to join their congregations, and to believe that the groups to which they belong do have a future. Second, they need to develop a strategic plan of action for recruiting—a challenge addressed later in this article. First, though, let’s take a look at some of the fundamental decisions priests, sisters, and brothers need to make about their lives today.

CHOICES MUST BE MADE

In addressing the first set of tasks outlined above, sisters, brothers, and priests must determine what they can and cannot do. For starters, they cannot do much about the current size of families, or the decision of many young people to delay life commitments, or society’s growing individualism and materialism. So, too, while they must work to help heal the victims of child sexual abuse, they cannot undo the devastating effects of past incidents. They can, of course, intensify the screening of applicants for priesthood and religious life, and put into place personnel policies aimed at protecting current and future children and young people from abuse.

All that said, priests, sisters, and brothers need to admit that they can do several things to foster vocations to religious life. First of all, they can pray for vocations, and they can pray daily for this grace. If the work of promoting vocations is to bear any fruit, it needs to be done within the framework of a vibrant life of individual and community prayer.

Second, groups planning to invite new members can define their identity and be clear about their mission: they must have a solid sense of who they are and where they are going. To arrive at that point, members will have to make choices about their religious congregations so that they and, eventually, everyone else understand clearly what each group stands for and what makes it different from others in our church.

The final task needs urgent attention. Several years ago, David Nygren, C.M., and Miriam Ukeritis, C.S.J.—directors of the Future of Religious Orders in the United States project—pointed out that the revitalization of consecrated life in America would require the resolution of conflicts in eight key areas: the nature of vocation, leadership, authority, corporate identity, role clarity, multiculturalism, materialism and the gospel, and charism. To give but one example, these investigators observed that there are men and women within U.S. congregations today who are clear about what makes their vocation distinct. Radically dependent on God, they possess a deep desire

for oneness with their Creator. Their altruism is also apparent: these men and women have a capacity to enter into the life of another for that person's sake, not to meet some personal need. Deeply committed to their congregations, they are willing to pay the high price that comes with such a commitment.

In the very same congregations, however, the potential generosity of other members is eroded by three factors: self-preoccupation and individualism, psychological difficulties, and a reduced willingness to make sacrifices for the group. Obviously, the differences that exist between these two groups need resolution if the congregation as a whole is to decide upon a clear identity and mission. At present, however, many of these groups limp along. Some members have migrated to the congregation's periphery, where they make significant contributions in terms of ministry but have little to do with their group or with religious life itself. The future of these congregations lies in their ability to decide between the high cost of gospel living in a religious order and the demands of an exclusively private understanding of vocation to religious life.

In addressing the challenging agenda developed by Nygren and Ukeritis, sisters, priests, and brothers would do well to remember Wittberg's point that religious congregations are social groups. Three types exist: intentional communities, associations, and bureaucracies. They differ, one from another, in terms of the amount of commitment required of members in each. An intentional community, for example, requires the greatest commitment of time, whereas an association—a voluntary organization that provides resources to members—demands the least. These organizations divide their work into specialized positions. Each has its own job description, and workers tend to be concerned only with the tasks assigned them. When a bureaucratized religious congregation sets up a vocation office, for example, its members assign the role of "expert" to the vocation promoter and absolve themselves of all responsibility for recruiting. Many people with an interest in religious life appear to favor intentional communities over some of the bureaucratic and associational setups that exist today. They are looking for groups that demand some sacrifice and whose transcendent mission takes precedence over the needs of individual members. Being part of a bureaucracy or holding membership in an association doesn't, to the vast majority of them, appear to be worth their life.

When it comes to community, then, young people offer a challenge to today's priests, sisters, and brothers. Perhaps, after nearly forty years of experimentation, women and men religious can rise to meet it and, working together with new members, create a

model of intentional community suitable for religious life in the twenty-first century. This type of fundamental reform and renewal is foundational. Priests, sisters, and brothers can also foster vocations to religious life by inviting young people to join their ranks. Have no doubt about it: a personal invitation to join religious life, offered to a young man or woman by a sister, priest, or brother, has been and continues to be one of the most powerful recruiting tools available. Unfortunately, today it is also one of the least used.

Any religious institute that plans to seriously promote vocations must also believe that it has a future. Young people today, understandably, have no interest in joining a congregation that believes it is going to die before too long. The men and women who make up these institutes need to believe that vocations to their way of life exist in the United States today. There is little reason to doubt that they do. The growth of fundamentalist Christian churches in North America, for example, along with the rapid development of sects and cults and the keen interest in various new age movements, suggest a profound religious hunger in our society. Contemporary religious communities face the challenge of developing and implementing ways to meet this deep spiritual need. With a strategic plan for recruiting in place, a group with interest in gaining new members can begin to plot its vocation promotion strategy. A clearly formulated and well-implemented plan of action, one that involves directly a significant percentage, if not all, of the group's membership, is essential for any progress to be made. On local, province, and national levels, congregations need to organize their members into work groups and set up, at least on the local level, regular meetings of these bodies. For what purpose? To allow members to draw up strategic plans for vocation promotion, to implement and evaluate those plans, and to encourage and support one another in the important work of recruiting.

Now for the hard part. Let's get the difficult commitments out of the way first. What's your answer to this question: Does the mission of your congregation remain as vital and urgent today as it was at the time of your group's foundation, and will it remain so for the foreseeable future? If your answer is yes, doesn't it stand to reason that your religious congregation, in light of today's vocation crisis, would want to make the recruiting of new members its number one priority? Vocation promotion is always rightly undertaken for the sake of mission—never, it is hoped, for reasons of survival. First of all, then, any congregation that wants a future for its mission needs to make vocation promotion its number one priority—not a sideline activity—for at least the next ten years.

The overwhelming majority, if not all, of the group's members will need to rearrange other commitments so as to free up 20 percent of their best time to devote directly to the work of vocation promotion. Why 20 percent? Because there is a lot to learn and a great deal of work to be done. If the members of any congregation today choose not to make vocation promotion their number one priority and not to provide the time for work in this important ministry, we can reasonably predict that they won't have a future and really don't deserve one. We have all heard the litany of good reasons why this member or that of any congregation just cannot get involved with the work of vocation promotion. Some say, "I haven't the time," or protest, "You don't understand the demands of the ministry in which I am engaged." Others hide behind age: "I'm too old," they say; "This work is the responsibility of younger people." Still others excuse themselves with this observation: "We already have a full-time vocation director." Everyone is busy; the median age of a number of groups would allow the majority of their members to beg off being involved, citing senior citizen status; most congregations today have a member full-time in the ministry of vocation promotion. So let's drop the excuses and come to a decision on this central question: Do you or do you not want a future for the mission and life of your congregation? Resolve that issue, and all else will follow.

ACTION PLAN FOR RECRUITING

Let's start our planning by taking a look at three of the chief challenges facing priests, brothers, and sisters when it comes to vocation promotion: to change religious life's public image, to educate young people about contemporary American religious life, and to begin again to invite young men and women to join this way of life.

Without a doubt, the public image of religious life in the United States needs a facelift. As mentioned earlier, the reputation of priesthood and consecrated life has been tarred recently with the brush of abuse scandals. The media, from time to time, have also taken note of the rapid and far-reaching changes that have occurred in the lives of priests, sisters, and brothers over the past four decades. Unfortunately, a number of reports reaching the public have been less than positive in nature. From the "new nuns" of the late 1960s to the empty novitiates and seminaries of today, this consistent message has gone out: great numbers are leaving; few, if any, are joining; everyone is aging. Not a very attractive picture. Media images of participants in U.S. religious life ranges from the sordid to the ridiculous: abusers of children, religious angry at their church, congregations divided

Our challenge: to get the word out that priests, sisters, and brothers are a far more varied, complex, and happy group of people than their current media image would suggest

sharply between liberals and conservatives, the "nuns" of *Nunsense*. Why would any self-respecting young man or woman want to get mixed up with these people? Our challenge: to get the word out that priests, sisters, and brothers are a far more varied, complex, and happy group of people than their current media image would suggest.

There are several steps we can take to ensure that theater, films, television, and the print and electronic media portray religious life and its members more accurately. First, we can correct false and misleading reports when they appear. If members of the Jewish or Muslim faith were portrayed in a manner similar to the women religious in the theatrical production *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You*, more than one voice would be raised in protest. Yet U.S. priests, brothers, and sisters remain silent and strangely passive as their way of life is distorted beyond recognition. This situation must change.

Public disapproval about media misrepresentations, however, is only a necessary first step. Action is warranted also on another front: men and women religious need to develop accurate and positive stories about their way of life and ensure that they appear in the media as often as possible. Why, for example, does the work of Mother Hale in Harlem, as exemplary and noteworthy as it is, attract so much news attention, while the very same ministry carried out by women religious usually does not merit even honorable mention by the media? To change

that situation, congregational leaders can challenge the writers, dramatists, and media experts in their respective groups, as well as their lay counterparts, to use their gift for writing to develop magazine and newspaper articles and books that describe contemporary religious life more accurately. Their efforts can be aimed also at shedding some light on the mission, motivation, and spirituality of today's priests, brothers, and sisters. Witness the impact, for example, of Sister Helen Prejean's *Dead Man Walking*, first a book and later a film.

The effort to present a more accurate and positive picture of religious life needs to be ongoing. A time-limited blitz of positive information about religious life, followed by a slide back into passivity, will not result in a long-term solution to the problem we face.

In their efforts to transform religious life's image in the U.S. media, congregations can also enlist the aid and expertise of several national organizations. Groups such as the United States Catholic Conference, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Council of Major Superiors of Women, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the National Religious Vocations Directors Conference, and the National Assembly of Religious Brothers can be a help, particularly in coordinating national efforts to influence the media.

What additional steps can we take to improve the image of U.S. religious life today? For one, we can set up congregational press offices: locally, regionally, or nationally, or at all three levels. Their job? To alert the media about any newsworthy stories involving men and women religious and their ministries. In years past, there were always a few pamphlets in the rack in church vestibules that explained something of the life of a sister, brother, or priest. Today, such material is notable by its absence. It needs to be developed again and made available in a variety of languages.

While many young Catholics may not be found in the vestibules of churches, they are frequent visitors to cyberspace. Men and women religious need to use the Internet more effectively to get out the Good News about their congregations and to invite young people to join them. In but one example, the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, has begun to use MTV and has opened a website (<http://www.catholicpriest.com>) to boost recruitment for the priesthood. Diocesan officials initiated this effort after asking high school students how they could better reach out to teens and young adults. Another website worth visiting lists congregations of men and women religious throughout the world (<http://www.vidimusdominum.org>).

Congregations, individually or in concert, can produce short videos aimed at educating Catholics and

the public at large about religious life today. In a bolder move, several congregations, or the national religious conferences working together, might approach commercial television producers with ideas for programs that would accurately portray their life and ministry. The television miniseries *Roots*, based on Alex Haley's book of the same name, had a powerful impact on the viewing public in the seventies. A similar series with an interesting story line, featuring contemporary men and women religious and their ministries, would go a long way toward improving the image of religious life in the United States.

Religious congregations can work at developing a positive relationship with the media by establishing contact with their local radio and television stations and offering to be of help with their religious programming. Don't wait for the personnel at a station to suggest ideas to you for stories or interviews; generate those ideas yourself and offer them freely. Don't get discouraged, though, if your suggestions are not met initially with enthusiasm. Eventually, some will work out, in light of your objectives and the overall goals of the station's programming.

Finally, the voices of young religious need to be heard. At times, it appears as though their elders are willing to listen to everyone else's voice except theirs! Working together, congregations could develop a video series similar in format to the *Men Vowed and Sexual: Conversations About Celibate Chastity* project produced by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. The latter series was developed several years ago to help men religious talk with greater freedom and ease about sexuality and their life of celibate chastity. We have all heard entirely enough about the "graying" of religious life; giving ear to those new to this way of life and learning more about their hopes, dreams, and concerns would benefit us all. A video series featuring young religious would also provide parishes, schools, and youth groups with another tool for the work of vocation promotion. Viewers would learn quickly about what first attracted these young people to their communities, and, more important, what makes them stay.

Many other ideas can be generated that will be helpful to priests, brothers, and sisters with an interest in changing the media image of their way of life. Groups will be limited in their ideas only by the imaginations of their members. Action is called for on several fronts.

If men and women religious feel a bit shell-shocked due to the extraordinary changes to their way of life during the past three to four decades, just imagine the reactions of the average Catholic. Many have felt betrayed in recent years by sisters, brothers, and priests: they fail to understand, for example, why

they no longer staff the parish school, live in the brothers' house next to the church, or act like the pastors of old. Little substantive work has been done over the past few decades to educate the Catholic population at large about contemporary religious life. We need to remedy this situation. A well-designed in-service program about religious life, aimed at lay men and women, is urgent also for a very different reason: everyone in the church community has a responsibility for recruiting new members for religious congregations. Bishops, priests, and laity, as well as men and women religious themselves, for example, were at one time among the greatest allies in the recruiting work of their congregations. Today these efforts are hampered because so many parents are confused about religious life, its nature and purpose, and how it is lived. Men and women religious must make an effort to restore their trust and enlist their aid once again. Education about the reality of contemporary religious life is a necessary first step in that direction. Young Catholics and their parents need education about religious life; so also do laypeople in general. To meet that need, men and women religious could offer to teach an adult education course on the topic in their parish, write an article for a diocesan publication, preach at mass, or give a Lenten or Advent series of lectures on the subject. The means are not quite so important as the message: religious life is alive and well and in need of new members. Armed eventually with a more accurate understanding of U.S. religious life and a greater knowledge of its mission, laypeople will be willing to help with efforts to recruit new members for this way of life.

TALK ABOUT CELIBACY

Celibate chastity is one area in which education is sorely needed. Why? Because celibate chastity is in trouble today. Young Catholics, for example, cite it as a possible explanation for the decline in vocations to religious life. Recent reports of child abuse and other sexual scandals involving men and women religious have also led a number of people to question whether a life of celibate chastity is a healthy way for people to live out their sexuality. Some even wonder if it is not somehow a cause of child sexual abuse. Though no evidence exists to support that mistaken notion, it is entertained at times, even by some mental health professionals.

Other people wonder whether a life of celibacy leads eventually to stunted emotional and psychological growth or is an impediment to deep and loving relationships. Obviously, a great deal of education about celibate chastity is needed to correct misun-

derstandings about this way of being a sexual person.

Men and women religious, though, have only themselves to blame for some current misconceptions about celibacy. Many, for example, when asked why they choose to live out their sexuality in this manner, reply with stock answers: for the sake of the Kingdom, to be more available, to love everyone and not just one person. Then they take a deep breath and hope that no one asks any more questions.

Most people who ask questions about celibate chastity do so out of curiosity. After all, only a small percentage of the world's population chooses to live out its sexuality in this way. In responding to their questions, three points need to be made clear. First of all, celibate people are not asexual. Similar to conjugal chastity, celibate chastity is a particular way of being a sexual person. Second, the spiritual life must be at the core of any life of celibate chastity. If it is not, this way of living the gospel makes little sense to others and, eventually, even to those professing to live it. Three, what is needed to live a life of celibate chastity well is pretty much what is needed to live any life well: discipline, asceticism, solitude, and a sense of humor.

Young people, in particular, can ask some pointed questions about celibate chastity. They are curious, too, to learn whether priests, sisters, and brothers are faithful to what they have promised. Integrity—being who you say you are and making choices about your behavior based on your values and commitments—is critical here.

Men and women religious will be more at ease in talking about celibacy if they develop a vocabulary with which to do so. More honest conversation about the topic among themselves can help too.

In the final analysis, however, what people are wondering about when they express curiosity about celibate chastity is the place of intimacy in the lives of sisters, priests, and brothers, not necessarily genital sexuality. The best response to concerns in that area is the presence within religious life of well-balanced people with dear friends and an ability to relate easily with others. Invite, invite, and invite!

When Merrill Lynch, the investment banking firm, is looking for new people to help staff its equity department, it does not send its recruiters to the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. It targets graduating classes at some of the nation's finest business schools and actively seeks out applicants for the positions that are open. As they develop strategies for gaining new membership, U.S. religious congregations could learn a great deal from the recruiting strategies of corporations. Recently, a number of priests, brothers, and sisters have reported that older candidates, some quite advanced in years, are more

Congregations need to choose some new ministries with vocations in mind, establish stronger links with the working class and minority groups, and teach their members how to ask young people to join them

the norm with their groups. One must wonder, however, if the median age of applicants is increasing because the aging members of many congregations are spending less and less time with young people.

Men and women religious may be surprised by the fact that a significant number of young Catholics judge themselves unworthy to join their congregations. They believe they lack whatever it takes to live religious life well. Contemporary religious, by inviting personally qualified young people to consider this life, can help reduce the anxiety of young adults and reassure them that they do in fact possess those qualities necessary for religious life.

Some sisters, priests, and brothers, though, raise an eyebrow when the conversation turns to today's young people. They are similar to those middle-aged parents who, enjoying their retirement and faced with the possibility of their adult children moving back into the family home, begin to see their offspring as nuisances. If men and women religious consider young adults to be nuisances, they need to realize that they are very necessary nuisances indeed. A number of midlife and older priests, brothers, and sisters are uncomfortable around young people, primarily because they lack the skills for relating to the emerging generation. Those skills, however, can be learned.

What is the next step in inviting young people to join in the adventure of religious life? Priests, sisters, and brothers must go to those places where generous young Catholic men and women can be found today. And just where would that be? In volunteer programs and Catholic youth groups, on the faculties of Catholic primary and secondary schools and universities and among their student bodies, at Newman Clubs, on parish and diocesan retreat teams, among the members of parish councils and similar groups, and in school service programs—these are all natural places to find them. So, too, are organizations such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, and Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO).

Men and women religious have always believed that grace builds on nature. In the past, they identified young people with solid human values and helped them discern whether or not they had a vocation to religious life. There are, as just mentioned, large numbers of generous young people today, working in a number of volunteer and paid positions with church and public social service and educational organizations. Priests, brothers, and sisters need to learn to “waste time” with them in all those places and to extend to potential new members a personal invitation to join religious life.

Where they have been neglected, vocation promotion efforts must be reestablished in secondary schools, universities, and parishes. A modern version of the “vocation club” can be set up. Posters and literature about religious life should be visible and available, and there must be regular contact between the religious on the staff and the students.

Priests, sisters, and brothers, for example, need to get out of the front administrative offices and back into the classrooms of the schools in which they continue to serve today. Alternative positions such as campus minister, counselor, or school chaplain would give them much-needed contact with students. Religious must be close to young people if they are ever to be in a position to invite them personally to join today's congregations.

Parish communities can also be sources of vocations. Called by Name, a program that asks parishioners to identify among the young people of their local community those with the qualities needed for religious life, is but one example of how the local church can help with the ministry of vocation promotion. Priests, sisters, and brothers are well advised to take advantage of this type of program regularly.

Finally, men and women religious can look to two other populations as potential sources of vocations to their way of life. First, in the past, significant num-

bers of priests, sisters, and brothers have come from the working class. As many U.S. Roman Catholics have prospered economically and moved on from the central cities, men and women religious have moved with them. For many, regular contact with populations of working-class youth has been lost. This relationship needs to be reestablished.

Second, recruiting among groups new to the United States and other minorities is a largely unexplored territory. To undertake such an effort, though, sisters, brothers and priests will have to examine their lifestyle. The culture surrounding religious life in America today continues to be chiefly of European origin. Men and women religious must be willing to alter their style of community, prayer, and other aspects of their life so as to reflect the cultures, hopes, and longings of the new peoples they invite to join them.

ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES

Along with addressing the three main challenges outlined above, religious congregations can include a number of additional elements in their pastoral plans for vocation promotion. They can, for example, set up some new ministries with vocations in mind. In the past, most groups have done just that. Consider, for example, the academies established by congregations of women and men in the last century with the purpose of attracting the most capable Catholic students. From among their numbers, they hoped to attract new members. Modern-day priests, sisters, and brothers need to locate at least some of their ministries in dioceses with sizable Catholic populations, with the plan of recruiting from among those groups.

In evaluating their commitment to certain long-standing ministries, men and women religious would benefit from identifying those that continue to provide the congregation with vocations and those that do not. If a particular work should be producing vocations and is not, the members of the congregation should ask themselves these two questions: "Is there anything more we can do to encourage vocations among the young people of this area? If not, for what reasons do we continue our commitment to this work?" If a group has done all it can to encourage vocations in a particular ministry, and none are forthcoming when they should be, its members had better have some very good reasons to justify their decision to stay with that work.

PERMANENT COMMITMENTS

In working to turn around the current crisis in vocations, priests, sisters, and brothers can also

challenge the conventional wisdom about permanent commitments. Generation Xers are reluctant to put down roots. Their hesitancy is due, in part, to what they observed during their growing-up years: the disintegration of the American family and the collapse of some revered institutions. Many also believe that they will be freer if they "keep their options open." This notion is mistaken.

Permanent commitments are quite compatible with freedom. Real freedom, after all, means being self-determining. What better way to achieve that end than to put down roots? We need to help young men and women discover that anew.

We also need to help them understand that there are some commitments in life for which the word *forever* is appropriate. Marriage is one of them; so is commitment to religious life. What justifies such commitments in our day and age? To date, no better way has been found to grow than to put down roots. Yes, it is that simple.

As they develop a pastoral plan for vocations, men and women religious can also revisit the question of what is the most appropriate age to welcome young people into the process of initial formation. Subsequent to Vatican II, the vast majority of religious congregations in the United States made a decision to delay the age at which candidates could enter the postulancy or novitiate. Conventional wisdom suggested that young men and women were better suited for formation after they had completed university studies and perhaps worked for a few years. Based on the belief that it would ensure greater maturity in candidates, the decision to delay the age of commitment was popular. Unfortunately, there was little, if any, scientific evidence to support it.

Delaying a person's age of commitment, in and of itself, has no apparent bearing on his or her ability to manage the stresses of later life. In contrast, personal identity—that sense of who you are and where you are going in life—does help people cope with the inevitable stress that accompanies growth and change. Delaying the age of commitment of candidates to religious life, however, in no way ensures that they will achieve a solid sense of identity.

The decision to accept candidates at a later age than before also brought with it a number of additional and unexpected problems. Those showing an interest in religious life at the end of secondary school, for example, were subjected unchallenged to the best and worst aspects of American culture for at least an additional four years. Men and women religious believed, rather naively, that they could undo the negative influences of the culture and reeducate candidates into gospel values once they entered formation.

The time has come to take a hard look at the successes and failures of formation programs inaugurated after Vatican II. Undoubtedly, these new initiatives have introduced many welcome changes in the process of initiation into religious life. They have also, however, discouraged a number of young people about this way of living out the gospel message. One young man put it this way: "It is almost impossible to join some religious congregations today. The ones I've looked into keep encouraging me to wait and to take advantage of a 'normal experience of development.' It makes me wonder what they think about their own life together. Also, I am beginning to question whether they have any interest at all in having me as a member."

A return to pre-Vatican II formation programs is not the answer. However, those instituted subsequent to the Council do not appear to be working the magic promised. Priests, sisters, and brothers today would do well to ask themselves some pointed questions: Is it possible that a 19- or 20-year-old man or woman knows his or her mind sufficiently that admitting him or her to a residential phase of religious formation is in fact the right move? Do we need to develop a more highly structured program of formation for university students with an interest in religious life, one that aids candidates to form a better sense of personal identity? What helpful models of vocation discernment can we develop for this same age group?

Has the time come, for example, for religious congregations to set up houses of discernment? These centers would aim at helping young men and women with an interest in religious life take a serious look at this way of living out the gospel. Made up of vowed members working in ministry and some young people, also fully employed, such groups would have to be clear about their identity and be marked by a regular life of prayer and service. Members would commit themselves to building an adult community of believers in the tradition of the founder or foundress of the congregation in question. The young people involved would be expected to live a life similar to that of the vowed members and would participate in regular spiritual direction. After a year or two of living with such a group, a young man or woman would, it is hoped, have a much better idea about the Lord's dream for him or her.

With the steadily increasing median age of congregations in the United States, their members must also ask themselves this question: Do they persist in delaying the age of commitment of candidates to their groups because they would just as soon not have a collection of unfinished and unruly 19- and 20-year-olds underfoot? Young people often disturb midlifers with their questions and challenges. They

are, though, also a rich source of new life and energy. Generation X and religious life: Are we willing to invite them in?

While baby boomers did not singlehandedly reform and renew U.S. religious life, they did make a contribution. The generation of priests, sisters, and brothers now classified as middle-aged came to this way of life thirty to forty years ago with ideas that many of their elders judged unorthodox. While they helped move along the winds of change that were sweeping over religious life in general, their most significant contributions came eventually in the area of mission.

Boomers challenged the members of their congregations to return to the original spirit of their founders and foundresses and to respond to the church's call to have a special concern for the poor. By asking some hard questions, they forced the members of their groups to take a close look at what they were doing and just why they continued to do it.

Generation Xers also have their contribution to make. It goes by two names: community life and spirituality. Mission, community, and prayer form the backbone of religious life. While boomers have not ignored the last two, they have given special attention to the first. Thirteeners are making us mindful of the others. We need to welcome their contribution, remembering how difficult our questions about mission were to the generation that preceded us.

Xers make us uncomfortable when they challenge, for example, some of the community arrangements that midlife religious have grown to accept as the norm over the past three decades. They ask, Just when did living alone as a permanent arrangement, finding one's own employment, and deciding independently on the use of almost all of one's free time, with only tangential contact with one's religious congregation, stop being called the "single life" and become just another form of community?

Their questions about spirituality, Jesus talk, prayer and faith worry many contemporary men and women religious because, in the past, such a primary focus could easily degenerate into a "me and God" type of religion. Perhaps, though, the questions that Thirteeners pose about prayer and faith can help point us toward a genuine apostolic spirituality—one that moves us away from the monastic forms that have been passed down to us and on to new ways of praising God. One must wonder actually if today, rather than witnessing the death of apostolic religious life, we are at last at a point where we can try to live it for the very first time. The members of Generation X can be a very important and necessary part of that adventure.

A FINAL POINT

Lest we idealize the emerging generation, let's admit it: some of its members can be maddeningly self-centered, hypercritical, and self-righteous. Aren't those the qualities, however, that make young men and women so interesting and exasperating at the same time? Today's young people, like their counterparts in generations that preceded them, are unfinished. The process of formation, hopefully, is meant to challenge them and help them grow. Naturally, if we invite them in, we will have to face a number of difficult situations. Some Xers will be unsuited for religious life; others will need more time to mature; still others, though, are destined to be fellow travelers with us on the pilgrimage that this way of life was always meant to be.

We Americans are a pragmatic people. Some would suggest that, as a nation, we never doubt our ability to solve a problem. So let's give ourselves this challenge: to turn around the current vocation crisis among religious congregations in North America over the next ten years. We can see that the media, used effectively, can be a powerful ally in our efforts to get out some Good News about our way of living out the gospel. We also know that men and women religious need to learn to talk more openly about their spirituality and their lives of celibate chastity, and establish some communities of welcome and discernment while fostering the same spirit in their remaining houses.

Permanent commitments, the age of admission to religious life, ongoing education for laity and clergy: all these areas need to be revisited and, where necessary, action plans must be developed to address them. Finally, congregations need to choose some new ministries with vocations in mind, establish stronger links with young people from the working class and minority groups, and teach their members, once again, how to ask young men and women to join them. Most important, a significant number of religious, like our missionaries mentioned earlier, must free up 20 percent of their time for the work of vocation promotion.

The Council challenged men and women religious to undertake a revolution of the heart. Joseph Bernardin learned that lesson early in life. He realized also, however, that we don't have to be extraordinary to accomplish this end. Instead, all that any

one of us has to do is to live well our rather ordinary lives. Have a spirit of welcome, be patient, practice forgiveness, love others, listen well, be tolerant, withhold judgement, be among the first to go the extra mile: simply put, be a brother or sister in word and deed. Could we ask for a better advertisement for religious life in our day or in any other?

The hour grows late for a number of congregations with members in the United States. We have little time to waste, and we will be dead if we wait for all our members to be "on board" before embracing the radical type of transformation called for by Vatican II and subsequent church documents. Rising to meet the challenge of vocation promotion now, on the eve of the millennium, let's begin our efforts by reigniting the fire that must burn brightly at the heart of our way of living. It is passion, after all, that has always attracted the young to religious life; rest assured, it will do so once again.

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Pascal to the Peak

James Torrens, S.J.

A solo hiker in raingear
(hello!) at our campsite,
wet through. We're curious.

News of the terrain—amiable
but brief. A red tent goes up,
a drowner, and in he goes.

Through our tent's skin
I've been reading the *Pensées*,
dark little spirit blooms.

He goes out upcanyon in drizzle.
When a fishing party returns
to cook us rainbows, where's he?

Before the animal life warms
next day, he's off to a height
that chafed us, Mystic Pass.

Blaise Pascal, allergic
to Jesuits (pronouncing us too soft
on fallen nature), was it you?

Enviably man, in the alone
woods, without birds, absorbed.
A rivulet is thunder.

Among geometric, tossed-up
proofs, your heart, we assume,
leaped. We'll be limping along.

Sometimes it helps to admire the enemy, especially in the realm of values and ideas. That's a good way, at least, to avoid underrating him. Take Plato and his aspirations toward an extreme ideal. Plato had a low estimation of material reality, including the emotions, and opted for severe public control—but what a vivid stylist and thinker. No, instead take the Frenchman Blaise Pascal (1623–62), whose *Pensées*, written from a Jansenist point of view, were the most trenchant prose of his century. In 1656–57, not long after the Jesuits had celebrated their first century of life with the sumptuous volume *Imago Primi Saeculi* (1640), published in Antwerp, Pascal reduced them to a laughingstock with his nineteen published letters, known as *les Provinciales* (the *Provincial Letters*). He called the *Imago* “a delirium of self-love.”

The “provincial” in these letters by Pascal was a fictional person in the countryside, to whom a correspondent described a whole series of conversations with Jesuits and his impressions of them, helped along by a Jansenist friend at his elbow. The Jesuits drew heavy fire on two scores in particular: their theology of sufficient grace and their casuistry. The Jansenists took their name from a bishop of Ypres who had published a volume entitled *Augustinus*, pushing to an extreme the views of Saint Augustine in favor of God's “victorious grace.” His French

disciples prolonged the intense debate in the Western church about grace and free will: To what extent are we determined by God's action in us, i.e., by grace, and to what extent is the drama of our action left to depend upon our exercise of free will?

The Spanish theologian Luis de Molina, S.J., had explained that everyone gets "sufficient" grace for virtuous action. A person's positive response, his or her cooperation with such grace, makes it "efficacious"; if we choose otherwise, the grace remains inefficacious. The Dominicans, eager to maintain the prime agency of God in all good works ("It is God who puts both the will and the action into you"—Phil. 2:13), held that efficaciousness had to be due to some further action on the part of God. The Jansenists, risking a form of predestination (the claim of God's picking only favorite subjects for salvation), expressed shock at the idea that God's grace can ever be anything but efficacious.

The Jesuits taught, furthermore, that a specific action cannot be considered sinful if God has not given us actual grace—that is, the knowledge of how evil the action is and the inspiration to avoid it. (The old Baltimore Catechism, without theologizing about grace, did list three components for any mortal sin—grave matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent of the will). Pascal commented tartly that in the Jesuit scenario, scores of the most earthly-minded people, delivered over to their pleasures and passions without a thought of God or any remorse, live blissfully in baptismal innocence.

In his fifth letter, Pascal began targeting Jesuits for their casuistry, their applied morality. In disputed matters of conscience—knotty moral dilemmas, in other words—they allowed recourse to the probable opinion of some one recognized authority. Pascal, in his determination to show how lax (*laches*) most of the Jesuits are, paraded some real beauties in the lineup of Jesuit opinions and contemporary moralists. He produced, in other words, a catalog of "obliging and accommodating conduct" that he judged "utterly pagan." In the minor Babylon that was the Paris of Louis XIV, his missives were read eagerly. The imaginary author quoted a Jesuit as saying, "Probabilism is the ABC of all our morality." The writer replied to him, in strict Jansenistic terms, "I'm not looking for the probable but the sure."

The French journalist and biographer Jean Lacouture recently published a shrewd and even-handed history, called simply *Jésuites*, in two volumes. Volume I devotes a chapter to Pascal. Lacouture refers to a sympathetic contemporary of Pascal's, Henri Gouhier, who saw the issues pretty clearly. The fathers, Gouhier recognized, had an acute awareness of the changes rocking the world

around them, where they had a mission to announce the gospel. They recognized these strong modern forces—the cultivation of reason, the expansion of the sciences, the thirst of individuals for some role in shaping the world. Lacouture quotes Gouhier about the Jesuit response:

Hence, in theology, comes their tendency to insist upon what the human agent can do, keeping in mind the psychological factors of one's action, and the part that free will plays in human cooperation with the work of grace. Hence, in moral teaching, their casuistry which, without abandoning principles, shows itself flexible [*conciliante*] in its applications, accommodating itself to the variable condition of people.

Pascal went on from the *Provincial Letters* to his major project, a book of apologetics meant for the free thinkers of his time. Upon his death, he had left only bundles of random notes, but his associates organized them under various headings and published them, with some toning down, as his *Pensées* (excerpted parts were later restored). These sentences and paragraphs, with their aphoristic brilliance—"Man is a thinking reed," "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not"—and their love of antithesis, remain as a milestone of French literature.

Again and again, Pascal observes and asserts the misery of human life, due to our original fall from grace. He admits, at one point, what he calls the scandalous, offensive aspects of this doctrine; he claims, however, "that man is more inconceivable without this mystery than this mystery is inconceivable to man." Despite the infirmity of our nature, says Pascal, a real grandeur belongs to it, thanks to a latent sense of the dignity from which we fell, and thanks in particular to our hope of God's mercy. Throughout these pages, the word *miséricorde* marches along behind the word *misère*.

The devotional pages of the *Pensées* are quite moving, in particular his meditation on Our Lord's Agony in the Garden: "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world; we must not sleep during that time." He understands Jesus to be saying to him, "I was thinking of you during my agony; I poured out such and such drops of blood for you."

"The optimism of those cosmopolitan pioneers," the Jesuits, to use Lacouture's phrasing, would clearly have been a scandal to this pious, skeptical, and exigent man, Pascal, as it was to all at the convent and abbey of Port-Royal. Even today, his outlook and his text pose some serious second thoughts to any naive theological assurance. Yet to read Pascal and to think about him has to confirm us at least in a mundane task—sorting through earthly complexities to seek

out what God wants of us here and now, with the whisper of a prayer, "Thy kingdom come."

Many pious and loyalist Catholics today have drawn a sharp line between themselves and fellow believers whom they find offensive. Publications and writers still fire away, or snipe, at the Jesuits in particular as betrayers of the faith. In the past few years, for example, a series of such brochures, called *Beacon Notes*, originating in the United States but translated into Spanish, has been circulated anonymously in Mexico. The authors present themselves as concerned Catholics whom zeal impels to warn bishops and priests to watch out for the doctrine and morals of Jesuits (which they copiously itemize) and to warn the laity to keep their children out of the danger of Jesuit schools.

The Mexican Jesuits, needless to say, little appreciate these broadsides. Such attacks, though, even as we labor to refute and disarm them, do have the merit of making us reflect. Where have we been off base? Is our fervor cooling? At the same time, they confirm us in our direction. Our regard for human freedom—for the individual response that we may coax and tutor and challenge but never manipulate and coerce—has to continue.

The Jesuits, Lacouture claims, have strayed often into Pelagianism. Maybe. Father Molina, in any case, hardly said the last word on that most mysterious of topics, the relationship of nature and grace. But he was in the right line, as Lacouture admits: "Whenever we read the name of Molina, from a doctrinal

point of view, we can substitute for it the name of Loyola."

My own fascination with Pascal dates from the summer of 1983, when two of us hiking in the Canadian Rockies were caught in rainy weather for three days. I had a pocket selection of the *Pensées* along, which I dipped into as we idled. When a solitary figure arrived in our camp in punishing weather, I fancied him to be the great man himself—a person, as we used to say in the seminary, to be admired but not imitated. He stood, in my mind, for someone pushing the quest for God to the absolute heights—yet he made me realize how social we are really meant to be, how companionate and supportive. And he makes me remember that Jesus, despite his continual desire to achieve the mountain, to be in union with the Father, descended to be one of us and could be readily coaxed from prayer to attend to the sick and ignorant. For all the sharpness of his teaching, he kept his voice quiet and his approach sensitive: "The bruised reed you shall not crush, and the smoking flax you shall not extinguish."



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Essentials of Discipleship

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part." (Luke 10:41-42)

How many times have we heard this gospel passage, and how many times have we been told—if not outright, at least implicitly—that it speaks of a choice between action and contemplation: between Martha, burdened with much serving, and Mary, seated at Jesus' feet in the posture of a disciple, listening to him speak? "The better part" was assumed to be the one chosen by Mary, Martha's sister.

But what was Jesus really saying to Martha? Was he continuing the dualism, the either/or attitudes of the Greeks that would have been well known in first century Palestinian Judaism: body/spirit, mind/matter, earthly/spiritual? Or was there perhaps something beyond this classic dualism, something deeper in Jesus' words, something to challenge us beyond our early, and maybe limited, notions of this story?

DIFFERENCE IN ATTITUDES

Undoubtedly, each of us has a personal reference point for reflecting on this story and wondering about

Jesus' seeming demarcation between the Martha and Mary attitudes. My own memory of this story, which reaches back to a reading of the text when I was very young, is complete with the picture in my mind's eye of that domestic scene at Bethany, where Jesus visits his two friends. I see the quiet, listening, recollected, seated Mary, contemplatively absorbing every word Jesus utters. In contrast, I see Martha, seemingly overwhelmed and feeling resentful, fussing over the preparation of a meal for the three of them in a whirl of dispersed energy and annoyance.

Hence, from an early age, this gospel passage has both haunted and challenged me. It has haunted me because, over the many years since, I have struggled with what has felt like the "unredeemed" Martha part of me, hoping at times to eliminate once and for all this "dark" side. Today, recognizing both the impossibility and the undesirability of this, I am challenged anew by the story. In coming home to it, I have sensed that at a deep level of my being, I am called to an integration of both Martha and Mary in my daily life as "the one thing necessary." I suggest that we might look to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a model of this integration exemplified in one person.

This article focuses on the Martha and Mary story in Luke as demonstrating the necessity for both action and contemplation in the life of discipleship—

the call of each one of us to conversion, integration, and transformation in our different vocations and lifestyles. In exploring the integration of Martha and Mary attitudes in our lives, I invite reflection on the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who modeled these attitudes in an undivided, integrated, and holistic way in her own life. In Mary we can see the ebb and flow of both these sets of attitudes in one person. I have chosen to explore these attitudes as recorded in Mary's Annunciation and Visitation.

MARY ATTITUDES: ANNUNCIATION

In order to get to the essence of what Mary attitudes look like in the Annunciation, let us revisit, for a moment, what we know about Martha's sister, Mary, on the occasion of Jesus' visit: "Mary sat beside Jesus at his feet listening to him" (Luke 10:39). During this encounter, Jesus told her sister, Martha, that only one thing was necessary—and, indeed, that Mary had found it. What is that one necessary thing that is integral to all the Mary attitudes that Mary, the mother of Jesus, exemplifies during the Annunciation? Is it the ability to truly listen? Such listening necessitates a quieting within in order to be open to what is heard, with an accepting respect for the other person. It also requires an openness to being called to change, to risk, to make oneself vulnerable in ways not even imagined. Further, it necessitates an implicit trust and faith in God that "all will be well" (Julian of Norwich), even in the midst of fear and doubt. With listening as the lens, let us now look at these Mary attitudes in the Annunciation.

Mary, the young Jewish woman betrothed to Joseph, was startled as she listened to the message of God from Gabriel. She was open to God's working through her, even when she was unsure of what was going on as she listened. In a reflective, contemplative stance, she pondered in her heart the words she had just heard. She came home to her own feelings, hopes, and dreams in treasuring these things in her heart. Luke doesn't give particulars about the time frame in which the Annunciation took place; it may have been a relatively brief event, or perhaps it was more of an awareness that occurred over a period of time, during which Mary would have had an opportunity to appropriate the significance of what she had heard and its implications for her.

When Gabriel said to Mary, "You are favoured . . . God is with you . . . you are blessed among women" (Luke 1:28); we are told, "she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be" (1:29). As Mary reflected on his manner of greeting, Gabriel saw that she was confused

and fearful, and he reassured her: "Do not be afraid; you have found favor with God" (1:30).

Mary listened to the news Gabriel had to give her (1:31–33). Gabriel spoke at length about her becoming the mother of God. She listened without interruption, and only after the angel finished did she pose her poignant, succinct, and only question: "How can this be since I am a virgin?" (1:34). Here, we see the Mary attitude of listening uninterruptedly. She waited for Gabriel to finish giving her the message from God. Only then did she ask her single question.

When Mary posed that incisive question, she displayed yet another Mary attitude, coming from her listening stance—that of going to the heart of the matter in a way that is both direct and receptive. This comes out of a listening, open, risk-taking heart. When Mary heard that she was to become the mother of God, she did not focus on that for the moment. Rather, she asked her question and then listened in order to problem-solve: "How can this be . . . ?"

Mary doesn't question God's will on her behalf, even though she is very surprised by all of this. With her Jewish history, she would have been aware that a Savior would come, and on occasion she may have even wondered how it would happen. So when Gabriel told her that the time had come for the Savior to come into the world and that she was the one chosen by God to help fulfill this promise, she was open to hearing about how this might unfold. Once Mary heard the answer to her question, her response is, "Be it done to me according to your word" (1:38). Her openness, a Mary attitude, flowed from her listening heart.

Yet another Mary attitude is that of implicit trust in the faithfulness of God, despite her surface fears and vulnerability in the face of the unknown. With this trust, she had an interior peace, in the depths of her being, that God was present and was speaking through the circumstances of this event. Paradoxically, in her inner core, she knew God's presence in its seeming absence.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, models for each of us many attitudes shown by Mary of Bethany. Jesus' mother had a listening heart—the core, the essence of "the better part," critical for the unfolding of these attitudes. She was willing to both hear and listen to God in her life, despite her own fears, struggles, and vulnerability. Mary's listening heart was nurtured through a centeredness—a balance in her life between action and contemplation.

Mary, the mother of God, was also willing to accept God's word and God's will in her life amid many unknowns. She was willing to risk, believing in the faithfulness of God: "I am with you always."

MARTHA ATTITUDES: VISITATION

Having focused on listening as the lens for viewing the Mary attitudes exemplified by Jesus' mother during the Annunciation, let us now look at her Martha attitudes, as manifested during the Visitation. Here again, because of the integration of both contemplation and action in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, the lens for these attitudes is listening.

"Martha, Martha, there is need of only one thing." In focusing on Martha attitudes as exemplified by Mary during the Visitation, it is important to consider Jesus' seeming admonition of Martha within the openness of naming once again the one thing he deemed necessary in Martha's life. Certainly, Jesus was not telling Martha that he didn't value or appreciate her gifts of hospitality, serving, and attending to others' needs. What she was doing was integral to the fabric of community.

To belittle attitudes of hospitality, welcoming, and moving out to people to attend to their physical, psychological, and social needs would be tantamount to belittling a whole aspect of everyone's life. We may be certain that Jesus both needed and enjoyed the meal Martha prepared and served. After all, Jesus was "on a journey" (Luke 10:38) and, on entering the village where the two sisters lived, would have appreciated Martha's invitation to come to their home.

Within this framework, what was "the better part" Jesus was telling Martha was the one thing necessary? It would appear that the crux of all this is Jesus' invitation to Martha, and to us, to look at how these Martha attitudes are part of our lives. Remember, Martha went through all the motions of hospitality and serving, but with a heart that was not a listening heart—a heart that was perhaps tied to the letter rather than the spirit of life, the spirit of love. How then, did Jesus' mother exemplify these same Martha attitudes, yet with a listening, open stance that came from a centered, integrated place within?

Looking at Mary in the Visitation story helps elucidate the way in which the Martha attitudes of caring for and serving others are integrated into the Mary attitudes. First, we see Mary's concern for others. When Gabriel told Mary, "Your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived" (Luke 1:36–37), Mary set aside her own preoccupations and traveled to Judah to share her cousin's joy. She also wanted to help her, because Elizabeth was already in her sixth month of pregnancy. As soon as Gabriel left, "Mary set out, proceeding in haste to a town of Judah where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth" (1:39–40).

This ability to move easily from her own inward gestation outward—to another's growth, joy, and, at

times, fear and confusion—came from, and moved out of, Mary's intuitive, listening, contemplative stance. It was an easy ebb and flow, intuited and carried out in an attitude of contemplation in action; the two went together.

It may sound as if this was easy for Mary, yet we know from our own experience that ease in anything comes only with discipline, endurance, and practice. In any discipleship integration, there is the interfacing of both the desert and the marketplace. The degree of the ebb and flow are dependent on the particular life circumstances of each person.

INTEGRATION OF ATTITUDES

When Mary, the mother of Jesus, arrived at Elizabeth's house, both her Martha and Mary attitudes apparently reached a point of such integration that they just naturally ebbed and flowed according to the context. What follows is a delineation of this integration.

As soon as Mary entered Elizabeth's house and greeted her (Martha attitude), Elizabeth responded to this gracious caring and solicitude with the immediate stirring of joy from the child in her womb. As Elizabeth told Mary about the effect of her visit on her and her child, she indicated her knowledge that Mary, also pregnant, was to be the mother of Jesus: "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42).

A Mary attitude of listening, waiting, and giving sacred space to another is obvious here. Jesus' mother gave this sacred space to Elizabeth, which invited Elizabeth, childless and womb-empty for so many years, to tell Mary the story of her own pregnancy, her gestation-fullness, and the imminent birth of her child. Mary had news of her own, but in the ebb and flow of her inwardness and outwardness, she had an intuitive sense of timing; the time to share her story would come. In this stance of integration, Mary demonstrated that "there is a season" (Eccles. 3:1) for speaking and a season for listening. In this scene between Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus' mother displayed an ease antithetical to the fretting and lack of inner peace seen in Martha when she was in a similar situation of caring, serving, and providing hospitality for Jesus.

Mary reciprocated Elizabeth's joy of anticipated new life, and only then did she focus on herself and what had happened in her encounter with Gabriel, God's messenger. The "magnificent" words placed in Mary's mouth are reminiscent of Hannah's joy at the birth of her son Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1–10). In her action of mercy toward her cousin Elizabeth, Mary moved back into a contemplative state as she thanked God

for what was to happen in her and through her: "My soul proclaims the greatness of my God, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Luke 1:46–47).

Mary stayed with her cousin for about three months (1:56), no doubt taking care of Elizabeth's needs in her advanced pregnancy. Evident were the Martha attitudes of being solicitous toward both Elizabeth and Zechariah in their new roles and vulnerabilities, caring for and serving them until John the Baptist was born. From the scripture passage, we know that Mary returned home shortly after the birth of John. In a reflective mood, she intuited the time to move on, to move back to her own desert, thus highlighting yet another integration of the Mary and Martha attitudes. In fact, we read nothing further about Mary in scripture until we reach the account of the birth of her own son, Jesus.

Here again, it is significant to note that the ebb and flow of action and contemplation can vary, depending on different factors in one's life, including our comfortability with the paradoxical nature of the process itself. What is paramount however, within a listening heart, is being in tune with this ebb and flow—intuiting compassionately when to come, when to go, when to move out, and when to stay put. It is recognizing, ultimately, that this is God's work within us: "Unless our God build the house, we labor in vain trying to build it" (Ps. 127).

ATTITUDES IN DISCIPLESHIP

The challenge for each of us, in our journey of becoming disciples of Jesus, is to integrate both Martha and Mary attitudes, contextualized within a listening heart, in an ebb and flow of prayer and action. This has everything to do with both the desert and the marketplace, not just one or the other. Appropriating Martha and Mary attitudes is a movement away from the dualism prevalent in Western philosophy and religion, handed down from the Greeks and reinforced by the French philosopher René Descartes and the period of the Enlightenment. Living out of Martha and Mary attitudes is a movement away from a dualistic, bifurcated existence and a conversion movement toward integration. This integration is badly needed in most of our lives in a postmodern church—and a listening heart is the one thing necessary.

In sitting at Jesus' feet, Mary assumes a posture—accorded only to disciples—and, in first-century

Palestine, specifically to men. Jesus shows how important it is for both women and men to be disciples through his acceptance of a woman in this role.

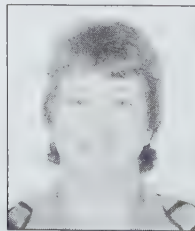
"The better part," as explored here, is a listening heart enfolded in discipleship for both women and men, in which prayer, reflection, risking, letting go, being vulnerable, serving, and being served are integrated in an ebb and flow of contemplation and action in their myriad ways. Such discipleship requires a lifetime appropriation of both contemplation and action, in which there will be an unfolding of times that will feel more like the desert and times that will feel more like the marketplace.

CHALLENGE AND INVITATION

The challenge for each of us, as disciples in our different lifestyles, is to undergo conversion into that deep integration within the totality of our beings, so that action and contemplation flow from and back into each other. This may mean coming to grips with some of our ways of being and doing, especially those that dualistically split us: earth/heaven, body/soul, mundane/spiritual.

Discipleship has nothing to do with the elitism of one call being "holier" than another. It has everything to do with conversion, centeredness, integration, and transformation of the disparate aspects of our being. Each one of us has within us monk and layperson, cloister and marketplace, heaven and earth, body and soul, integrated in potential. Discipleship is all about kenosis and metanoia in an ongoing integration of our Mary and Martha attitudes.

The invitation to each of us, as disciples, is to consciously nurture, with a listening heart, both the Martha and Mary attitudes in us. Integrating them is a lifelong process that Mary, the mother of Jesus, modeled for us. Her own integration came from her ability to listen and "ponder all these things in her heart."



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Understanding Diocesan Priesthood

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

*When I was in the monastery, I could curb my idle talk and usually be absorbed in my prayers. Since I assumed the burden of pastoral care, my mind can no longer be collected; it is concerned with so many matters . . . I am forced to consider the affairs of the Church . . . I must become an administrator . . . With my mind divided and torn to pieces by so many problems, how can I meditate or preach wholeheartedly without neglecting the ministry of the Gospel? . . . And because I too am weak . . . who am I to be a watchman, for I do not stand on the mountain of action but lie down in the valley of weakness. (Gregory the Great, *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. 4, pp. 1365–66)*

Gregory had eschewed his former administrative position as prefect of Rome and devoted himself entirely to the contemplative life. When his life of prayer was threatened by his election to the papacy, he appealed unsuccessfully to Emperor Maurice not to confirm the election. But he was taken to Saint Peter's, where he was consecrated the bishop of Rome. As pope, Gregory was a tireless worker. His deacon said that the saint never rested and worked himself tirelessly, "almost to a skeleton."

While Gregory might not be the best example of living a balanced life, his lament over losing his contemplative monastic peace and becoming weighed down with pastoral and administrative cares is one with which most diocesan priests can readily identify. His words describe a man who believed his spiritual life had been torn to pieces once he left his

monastery. Ironically, Gregory became a canonized saint and doctor of the church "despite" his distracted life in the world. Apparently, his own evaluation of the deteriorating quality of his spiritual life in active ministry was inaccurate.

To this day, the belief endures that the spiritual life of active ministry, such as diocesan priesthood, is inferior—or at least diminished—because it is full of interruptions and mental burdens. For example, before becoming a diocesan priest, a friend recalled being in a monastery and discussing his future with one of the monks. The monk asked what his plans were, and my friend spoke of his intention to enter the diocesan seminary. "Oh," the monk said with a downcast look, "at least that's something."

Diocesan priesthood has long been viewed as a lifestyle with little spirituality. What spirituality it did have, it was thought, consisted of remnants adapted from the religious life and monastic enclosures. The diocesan priest's spiritual life was thought of as being carved out of a busy day full of the demands of public ministry. Should he be called to a "higher" vocation such as the religious or monastic life, this was to be encouraged as a spiritual step up in the line of perfection. Otherwise, he remained a "secular" priest.

In recent years, a conscious attempt has been made to avoid ranking vocations or orders, whether religious or lay. And since diocesan spirituality is now less frequently viewed as a remnant of the monastic life, attempts have been made to identify the unique

spirituality of the diocesan priest. These efforts have suggested that the diocesan spirituality is *not* carved out of a busy day. Rather, the events of the day are an integral part of how a diocesan priest experiences God and thus part of the very essence of his spiritual life.

This effort to delineate a diocesan spirituality is particularly important today. Not only is it important for the training of future diocesan clergy and for the encouragement of those who already serve as diocesan priests; it is also particularly urgent given the sharply declining numbers of priests available for service in the next decade.

STATISTICS ARE ALARMING

Almost every diocese in the United States is now making plans for the future allocation of its dwindling presbyterate. For example, one diocese in the United States recently sent its statistical projections of available priests to all its clergy. From 1998 to 2005, the diocese projected, there will be a 43 percent drop in the number of priests available for ministry. In 2005 there will be 40 more parishes than active priests. Such alarming statistics are repeated in dioceses across the country and beyond.

Naturally, plans for the allocation of our scarce priests must take into account the pressing, and rising, ministerial needs of the lay community. However, such plans should also serve the goal of fostering the spiritual charism of diocesan priesthood. The danger is that future plans will ignore the diocesan charism and attempt only to fill vacant ministries.

Deployment plans will necessarily support or hinder models of diocesan priesthood, depending on the principles on which they are built. It is likely that some of these plans will not state these models explicitly, but they will nonetheless have significant effects on the future course of priesthood in their dioceses. It is imperative that these critical plans take into account an authentic diocesan spirituality and thus the spiritual and psychological well-being of the men who serve in these vocations.

LIVING WITH THE PEOPLE

I would formulate what I believe to be the essence of a diocesan charism as follows: *The diocesan priest is someone who lives with the people, and each becomes a part of the other's life.* Almost every other element of his spirituality flows from this one inescapable fact. The diocesan priest does not have a calling apart from the People of God whom he serves. He lives among them and, as the years pass, the lives of a diocesan priest and the people whom he serves become inextricably intertwined.

This call to live among the people is not to be viewed as an abstract, transcendent concept. Rather, the diocesan priest is “incardinated” in a particular geographical place, his diocese, and he lives among a particular group of people. He is meant to have a special filial relationship of love and obedience for the bishop—the shepherd—of the diocese in which he lives. The diocesan priest may not become an itinerant, moving from place to place.

EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED

Moreover, the diocesan priest's presence among the people is not simply a physical presence. He may not remain emotionally and spiritually isolated from them. More than a few diocesan priests fall prey to perpetual isolation because of a lack of social skills and emotional health. While they might fulfill the bare minimum of necessary duties to remain in ministry, such as saying mass and performing other sacramental duties, they spend the remainder of their hours in solitary pursuits.

This disconnection from the people cripples their ministry and their own spiritual growth. Although such priests are physically “in the world,” they are not truly living a diocesan priest's vocation; they are not emotionally and spiritually “in the world.”

Similarly, some deployment plans for diocesan clergy have the potential to isolate emotionally the priests from the people. For example, an increasing number of priests will become responsible for several parishes. The danger is that these priests will become “circuit riders.” They will move from parish to parish administering sacraments but may find it difficult to get to know the people or to have the people know them.

A consistent support and challenge for the diocesan priest comes from the people of God. Their presence is an important way in which God is manifested to him. As he personally connects with the people whom he serves, the diocesan priest is affirmed, supported, challenged, and “stretched.”

IN BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Because of his place among the people, the diocesan priest is challenged to fulfill the words of John, chapter 17: he is “in the world” but does “not belong to the world.” The danger is that he will be converted to a completely secular perspective. He is constantly tempted to lose his gospel vision and to become a slave of materialistic and worldly values. While accepting what is truly of value in the world around him, the diocesan priest should reject in his own life, and call to the attention of those he serves, the injustices and corruptions that threaten the integrity of the Christian community.

To maintain his gospel vision in a secular world, the diocesan priest must frequently nurture that vision. Gospel values are supported in many ways. For example, diocesan priests often find they are reenergized and refocused after gatherings with brother priests and others engaged in ministry. In addition, diocesan priests often resort to prayer and periodic extended retreats, allowing the Spirit of God to enliven and deepen their spiritual sight. For example, they often engage in their own sort of *lectio divina*; that is, they meditate on the scriptural readings in the lectionary to prepare their weekday and Sunday homilies. This reflection time is both prayer time and preparation time. It is a good example of how diocesan priests' active ministry easily spills over into prayer.

Without a consistent resorting to these and other ways of spiritual renewal, the priest in the world is likely not only to become drained of his emotional and physical energy but also to lose the true reason for his vocation. A gospel vision, like a tender shoot, must be carefully tended, particularly when it is surrounded by many forces that threaten its growth, or even its survival. And because he is not of the world, the diocesan priest will not engage in every offering of society. A number of activities and places inherently proclaim a set of values contrary to his own. For example, it would not normally be appropriate for a priest to frequent bars with bad reputations or places of great luxury. Because he is in the world, the priest's actions are noticed, and his life is known to his people. The priest comes to realize that how he lives his life among the people is his most important homily.

RELENTLESS BOUNDARY CHALLENGES

Being in the world brings up another demanding task for the diocesan priest: establishing boundaries. Perhaps more than any other secular or religious professional, the diocesan priest is set up for relentless assaults on his personal life and challenges to appropriate pastoral boundaries.

Secular professionals such as lawyers or doctors have offices set aside from their homes to serve their clients. It is almost unthinkable these days to call or meet doctors or lawyers at their private residences. There are inherent boundaries between secular professionals and their clients. The diocesan priest, on the other hand, finds his vocational calling in living with the people. The separation between the personal and the professional is blurred by the nature of this life. The diocesan priest is a companion to the people. He socializes with them. He attends their parties and family functions. He meets them in the rectory as well as in their homes. He sees them on the ballfields and in the schools. His vocation calls him

to be present to his people in the daily fabric of their lives. Setting typical professional boundaries is not just impossible for the diocesan priest; it would be contrary to his charism. Still, increasing emphasis is being placed on the importance of boundaries for our clergy today. There are painful consequences when appropriate pastoral boundaries are crossed. However, the unique circumstances of a diocesan priest's life pose a particularly difficult problem in maintaining these boundaries.

This challenge has become even more difficult in the post-Vatican II era. A significant shift, which has gone largely unnoticed, has taken place in diocesan ministry over the past thirty years. A powerful example of this shift is hidden within recent liturgical changes. In the pre-Vatican II era, the priest at the altar faced away from the people, his arms were only shoulder-width apart, there was a Communion rail separating him from the congregation, and he spoke in a foreign language. In liturgical as well as in a number of other pastoral settings, the boundaries were clearly set and enunciated in a number of non-verbal ways. Now the Communion rail is gone. The priest faces the people. He speaks to them in their own language, the altars are moved forward, and the priest opens his arms wide. The message has changed. The priest's words, the new arrangement of the sacred space, and his body language now say to the people, "Come into my life." And they do. People wonder why many priests become overly involved, sometimes with tragic consequences, with some of their parishioners. Given the recent boundary changes in the new church, I find it surprising that more do not.

Diocesan priests also feel increasingly overwhelmed by the demands of the people. According to a 1993 survey of diocesan priests in the United States, commissioned by the National Federation of Priests' Councils (NFPC), "unrealistic demands and expectations of lay people" increased almost threefold as a "great problem" personally for priests—from 8 percent in 1970 to 21 percent in 1993. Similarly, the problem of "too much work" increased almost twofold, from 8 to 17 percent. With the number of Catholics rising, the numbers of clergy declining, and expectations increasing, the need for appropriate limit-setting is all the more critical.

SANCTIFYING IMPORTANT MOMENTS

In living among the people, the diocesan priest may function in a variety of roles, such as counselor, administrator, civil rights advocate, or teacher, in addition to his most common role as pastor. Nevertheless, his presence in the peoples' lives always has a unique

focus. His ministry ultimately points to the presence of Christ and his gospel. As the scriptural metaphor suggests, he is meant to be a spiritual leaven in the community—the gospel “yeast” that will cause the communal “dough” to rise. Many of the faithful recognize this role of the priest. As a result, his presence is welcomed or sought out for many mundane activities. He might be asked to bless a new home or a ship. He is invited to picnics and athletic events. He attends public functions, and while he is often asked to perform such ordinary tasks as praying the blessing before the meal, it is really his presence that is sought, and the faithful are grateful for it.

But a special focus for the diocesan priest’s presence is during critical moments in peoples’ lives. A priority for the diocesan clergy has always been major events such as the births of children, marriages, sicknesses, reconciliations, and deaths. Their presence during these critical experiences is not only a consolation; diocesan priests, by virtue of their ordination and their status as representatives of the church, bestow a special blessing. By the sacraments of baptism, marriage, anointing, and viaticum, as well as the forgiveness of sins, priests sanctify these critical moments; by joining the human and the divine, they raise up these events to be powerful instruments of God’s grace. The sacramental life of the church and the vocation of diocesan priesthood are interwoven because the lives of the people and the priest are inextricably joined.

STANDING IN THE BREACH

The diocesan priest spends much of his time listening to the people. After years of pastoral ministry, he becomes acutely aware of and sensitive to their struggles. He comes to understand their hopes and dreams, as well as their pains and sorrows. He empathizes with them and at times may even sympathize with them—that is, he may feel their pain in a personal way. The diocesan priest is the heart of the church leadership among the people.

In our present era, the church’s consistent and important message of respect for life is often challenged. Its teachings on the death penalty, euthanasia, contraception, and abortion are decidedly countercultural in Western society. Similarly, the gospel call for social justice—including an equitable sharing of the world’s resources, a recognition of the most basic human rights, and a preferential option for the poor—continues to be rejected, by word and deed, in many of the richest and poorest nations. The diocesan priest stands among and with the people, appreciating their concerns and perspectives yet also exhorting and challenging them.

PRAYER AND GUIDANCE

One of the important but little-recognized roles of the priest is to pray for his people. This role is recognized in church law. On each Sunday, the Lord’s day, one of the masses offered by the pastor must be for the people (canon 534, no. 1).

The diocesan priest listens to and feels with his people. He thinks with them. He also listens to the Word of God as transmitted through the scriptures and the teachings of the church. Thus, he also thinks with the church. The diocesan priest thus stands at a midpoint that is sometimes a point of conflict. But a gospel vision and church teachings do not usually provide a strict blueprint for everyday moral decisions. The diocesan priest assists the people in interpreting these teachings for modern daily life. His unique calling and personal understanding of the plight of his people make him particularly suited to providing pastoral guidance for the laity. In this role, he consistently sets before the people the mercy and compassion of Jesus. Yet his pastoral sympathies should not give way to license. Sometimes his message is a difficult one, and delivering it is a part of his cross.

A DIOCESAN CELIBACY

Just as the spirituality of a diocesan priest is different from that of his religious and monastic brothers, so his experience of celibacy is also unique. While all humans are prone to experience the pains of loneliness and, at times, to feel burdened by that pain, loneliness is a particular trial for the diocesan priest. In the NFPC survey previously cited, “loneliness” was named by diocesan priests as one of the most significant problems facing them today. Celibacy denies the priest the companionship of a spouse and the support of children. His charism of living among the people takes him out of the monastery and away from the support of a religious community. This charism places him, often as the only priest, alone with his people. As the numbers of clergy in some countries decrease, those who remain are increasingly separated from other priests. It is little wonder that the parish priest, after experiencing the joy of celebrating Sunday liturgies with his people, may find his spirits sinking on Sunday afternoons, after his people have all gone home to their families and he is left behind.

Diocesan priests consistently speak of the support they receive from their brother priests. Indeed, such support will be increasingly important as the numbers of priests dwindle. Groups such as *Jesu Caritas* and *Emmaus* can be very helpful and, I believe, should be encouraged. But the diocesan priest spends most of his time separated from other priests and immersed

in his life among the people. Thus, another important support for his celibate vocation comes from the very people to whom he ministers. As celibate men, priests often find refuge and support among a few families with whom they feel welcome and can relax. Particularly during such lonely times as Sunday evenings, diocesan priests may seek the solace of family life. Such relationships can go awry in a number of ways. Nevertheless, being surrounded by the companionship of a married couple and the enthusiasm of children, even for a few hours, is a comfort.

I remember well the lament of a retiring priest. He was a particularly holy man who was much loved by his parishioners. I said to him on the eve of his retirement, "I have heard from many of the people, and they are wondering how they will live without you." He responded sadly, "How will I live without them?"

A SPECIAL FRIEND OF JESUS

A diocesan priest has a unique charism and thus a unique spiritual life. Instead of viewing his spirituality as one of trying to squeeze out a few sacred moments in an otherwise unspiritual day, he should recognize that the life of a diocesan priest among his people is an integral part of his spirituality and the way in which God is revealed to him.

At times in the past, some in diocesan ministry have misinterpreted this spirituality and have fallen prey to such rationalizations as "my work is my prayer." While recognizing the true spirituality of public ministry, the call to prayer and to fostering a personal relationship with God is as critical for the diocesan priest as it is for those who follow any other vocation. Indeed, one can make a case for it being more important, given the pressing demands of ministry and an often hectic life of service.

In the NFPC survey, the percentage of those who cited "too much work" and the "unrealistic demands and expectations of laypeople" as pressing problems for diocesan priests has been increasing since 1970. To counterbalance such demands and to find needed spiritual sustenance, frequent recourse to private prayer is essential.

Moreover, I believe an essential gift offered to the celibate priest is a unique friendship with Jesus. While this does not make the priest's vocation better than other vocations, even a cursory reading of the scriptures clearly demonstrates the special friendship Jesus had with his twelve personally chosen disciples. He called them by name, invited them to share three precious years with him, and journeyed with them. Jesus spoke to them plainly, as the scriptures say, and not in parables. He called them friends. And after Jesus died, his ministry was passed directly on to them.

The diocesan priest continues the ministry of Jesus in a direct and conscious way. With the strength provided by his unique friendship with Jesus and with the support of his people, he becomes a kind of "sacrament" for his people as he calls on God to sanctify their lives.

EUCCHARISTIC SUMMIT

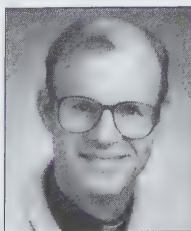
Ultimately, the diocesan priest's life among the people achieves its summit in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is no wonder that diocesan priests often speak of having their most fulfilling moments while presiding at Sunday liturgy. The priest's greatest charism is to stand among his community around the Lord's table and to give thanks to God. Such privileged moments of grace help sustain him through the dark hours.

The people whom the diocesan priest serves can challenge him in many ways, and at times they can be a cross. But more often, they are a support and a comfort. A diocesan priest who is true to his vocation will eventually come to see in his people a community of friends to walk with him in his own journey through life.

COME AND SEE

I remember well the words of Father Frank McNulty, reflecting on his life as a diocesan priest. He said, "Priesthood is a lot better than I thought it would be . . . and a lot tougher."

Many of our young people today are looking for a challenge. They want an authentic life that challenges them both personally and spiritually. They want their lives to make a difference. Diocesan priesthood is such a life. It is difficult. It is challenging. It will make you stretch in ways you had not even imagined. And it will make a big difference in many people's lives. In our day, the pains and sorrows and limitations of our priests are well known. What is hidden are the joys and consolations that touch their hearts each day. To the young or not-so-young who think they hear the Lord's call, I say, "Come and see."



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Convent Stress Revisited

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

Reverend Peter Lourdes, S.D.B., is a psychologist working in Calcutta, India, where he facilitates programs for a variety of groups and continues the practice of psychotherapy. Last August, while giving a renewal workshop on stress to a group of thirty-one sisters, he made use of my article "Stress in the Lives of Women Religious" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Summer 1998). Both he and the sisters were surprised at the similarities between the problems they experienced and those indicated by the two groups of sisters from the United States who participated in the study. He shared with me the findings he gleaned from the reports of the sisters attending his workshop, and I am pleased to relate them in this article.

Thirty-one sisters from the state of Kerela, India, members of the Calcutta province of their congregation, answered three questions that addressed the main signs of stress, the effects of stress on their lives, and the coping mechanisms used to handle stress. The sisters' backgrounds were primarily rural, and they ranged in age from 45 to 63.

In response to the initial question, regarding the main signs of stress they observed among members of their province, they indicated the presence of symptoms that might be divided into five major categories: irritability, depression, physical symptoms,

compulsive behaviors, and interpersonal problems. When speaking of irritability, for example, the sisters noted angry words, moodiness, grumbling, oversensitivity, passive-aggressive behavior such as "always forgetting," criticism, and a tendency to punish others. Depression was defined in terms of brooding, silence, and a sense of alienation, as well as withdrawal, indifference, lack of self-esteem, and a sense of being unwanted; lack of a sense of belonging and lack of interest in prayer were also noted. The physical symptoms cited included several that were very similar to those reported by the American sisters: high blood pressure, migraines, fatigue, weight loss, gastric problems, and shortness of breath. In addition, the Indian sisters noted symptoms not reported by the Americans—namely, itching, scratching, and allergic responses. Compulsive behaviors included nonstop talking; excessive use of coffee, tea, food, and sleep; gossiping; and workaholicism. Signs of stress expressed in interpersonal behaviors included lack of trust, jealousy, envy, closed-minded attitudes, indifference and coldness toward others, and criticism of others. One sign of stress that did not seem to fit into any particular category was "financial problems." As no additional explanation was given, I cannot comment on the meaning of this particular item.

STRESS EFFECTS SIMILAR

The effects of stress on the sisters were also strikingly similar to those reported by the American sisters. Some reported a sense of gloominess, feelings of insecurity, confusion, and a lack of enthusiasm and spontaneity. Also reported were doubts and suspicion of others, which in turn created divisions among the sisters. Another effect of stress, an impaired ability to concentrate and to communicate, led to feelings of tension and uneasiness. These in turn contributed to a sense of a lack of freedom and to impaired interpersonal relationships, as isolation of the other rather than genuine concern tended to result. Difficulties in one's spiritual life were also noted.

Efforts to cope with stress included prayer and seeking spiritual direction and opportunities for retreat. Unlike the American sisters, the Indian sisters specifically noted seeking medical attention as a means of coping with stress. Distractions such as listening to music, visiting friends, and other recreational activities helped to reduce stress. In dealing with a person viewed as a source of stress, the Indian respondents tended either to engage in dialogue with that person or to avoid the person, discuss the problem with others, and allow time for the situation to cool down rather than risk an immediate confrontation.

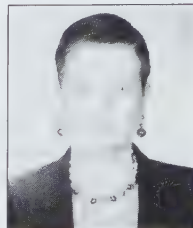
STRESS APPEARS EVERYWHERE

These reports, coming as they do from sisters whose cultural backgrounds are markedly different from those who participated in the original study, attest that stress knows no borders. Indeed, the participants in Father Lourdes' workshop concluded, "We are sisters in the same stress."

Certainly, the presence of some degree of stress is simply a fact of life for every person. Indeed, an optimal level of stress often spurs new development. We all need challenges in our lives, and one senses a certain zest for living in those who "lift up their eyes to the hills" and dare to dream. Nevertheless, it might be helpful to look into the structures within the religious community itself, the ministerial demands placed on sisters, and the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics that seem to create levels of stress that stifle rather than enhance growth and creativity. Too often, many sisters simply feel overwhelmed, diminished, and worn out.

We need to look into the structures within the religious community, the ministerial demands placed on sisters, and the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics that seem to create levels of stress that stifle growth and creativity

I invite all interested readers to send suggestions on how to eliminate unnecessary sources of stress and to develop the means to deal more effectively with the stressors that are part and parcel of everyday life. Those who have benefited from stress management training are encouraged to report on their successes. In future articles, I will share your insights with our readership. Perhaps, in time, we will be not only "sisters in the same stress" but sisters and brothers in the resolution of unhealthy levels of stress as well.



Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist who counsels, directs workshops, and performs assessments for members of religious congregations in the Washington, D.C., vicinity. She is a faculty member at the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The Manic-Depressive Minister

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

Reverend James Allen, an associate pastor at a suburban parish, was well regarded among his peers and superiors in his southwestern diocese. He had a reputation for being a hard-working and productive priest—both in his parish, which was his full-time assignment, and at the campus of the local state university, where he had a part-time assignment. Recently, he was observed to be even more active and productive. Within a period of two weeks, he initiated several ambitious projects, including program development and a capital fundraising campaign. These projects were not new to the pastoral team, because Reverend Allen had thought and talked about them for months.

Then he seemed to shift into a decreased sleep mode and a stepped-up work schedule, and he started operationalizing these diverse projects all at once. Since he was so resourceful and successful in his ministry, few initially noticed that his expansiveness was getting out of control. But when he began to call some of his priest colleagues in the middle of the night, sometimes talking about the same ideas repeatedly, concern began to grow.

It was during this frenzied period that he began binge drinking and became sexually involved with a former parishioner, whom he had met at a bar. This last action sounded an alarm in the parish and the

diocese, and the pastor and vicar for priests mobilized very quickly. Plans were instantly made to admit the priest to a private psychiatric hospital, where he was treated first with lithium carbonate and then with carbamazepine. Within a week and a half, he was discharged to outpatient treatment, which included psychotherapy and medication management. He was able to return to a more realistic level of activity and responsibilities.

HIGH INCIDENCE IN MINISTRY

For several years Reverend Allen had manifested a hypomanic personality, which then, over a period of a few weeks, “switched” into bipolar I disorder, a type of manic-depression. While bipolar disorder is present in approximately 1 percent of the general population, it has a much higher incidence and prevalence among ministers, perhaps in the range of 5 to 10 percent. It appears that most individuals who experience bipolar disorder exhibit a characteristic biological predisposition or temperament, as well as a characteristic personality structure or style. Hypomanic personality is the most common personality structure noted in individuals with bipolar disorder. Whether an individual with this personality style will manifest symptoms of bipolar disorder depends on

the presence or absence of various triggering stressors and factors.

Hypomanic personality and bipolar disorder, in its various manifestations, are commonplace in professional ministry today, just as they are in professions such as law and medicine and in careers in sports, entertainment, politics, and business. This article briefly describes the dynamics of bipolar disorder and the hypomanic personality as it relates to ministry. It then offers various strategies for managing these conditions with regard to psychiatric treatment and organizational considerations within a religious context.

BIPOLAR DISORDER/MANIC DEPRESSION

Clinical Features. Until recently, bipolar disorder was referred to as manic-depressive illness. In the popular mind, manic depression is understood as cycles of profound elation or mania followed by a period of deep depression. Actually, in psychiatric circles, and according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition (DSM-IV), the presence of mania or hypomania is considered the defining feature of bipolar disorder. Mania refers to a predominant mood that is elevated, irritable, or expansive and that is of sufficient severity to cause marked impairment in social or work functioning. Several symptoms can be associated with this mood: hyperactivity, racing thoughts, distractibility, pressured speech, decreased need for sleep, inflated self-esteem, and overinvolvement in potentially dangerous activities. Sometimes psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions may be seen in the acutely manic individual. Hypomania refers to an elevated, expansive, or irritable mood that lasts at least four days and has many of the same symptoms of mania but causes less impairment.

Bipolar disorder has a number of manifestations. Three types will be briefly described in this article: bipolar I disorder, bipolar II disorder, and bipolar disorder not otherwise specified (NOS). Bipolar I disorder identifies an individual with one true manic episode. While there may be a history of depression or hypomania, such a history is not needed to make the DSM-IV diagnosis of bipolar I disorder. In bipolar II disorder there is a history of major depressive episodes and hypomania but no history of mania. Bipolar disorder NOS is a category encompassing an array of bipolar-spectrum illnesses that do not meet the criteria for such disorders as bipolar I or bipolar II. It would include the designation “hypomanic personality.”

Concomitant Substance Abuse. When an individual is diagnosed with a bipolar disorder, it is likely that a concomitant substance abuse or dependence disorder is present. However, it is not likely that this related disorder is formally diagnosed and treated. Research suggests that at least two-thirds of all individuals with a bipolar I or II disorder are diagnosable for alcohol abuse, alcohol dependence, or another substance abuse or dependence disorder. Many individuals with bipolar disorders have family histories of substance abuse or dependence. And many bipolar individuals have a long history of self-medicating their highs and lows with “uppers” and “downers,” irrespective of whether they have ever taken an antimanic medication. The type of substance abuse or dependence ranges from “uppers” such as cocaine, amphetamines, and prescription medications like Ritalin to “downers” such as opiates, barbiturates, or such prescription medications as Valium, Tranxene, Librium, Ativan, Xanax, Percocet, Darvon, and other addictive medications.

Ministers are particularly prone to abusing prescription medications. Clergy in particular find it relatively easy to obtain prescriptions. Family physicians and even psychiatrists may be easily persuaded to prescribe medications that further complicate the minister’s recovery. After all, “no one wants to see Father Smith in pain (or anxious).”

Psychodynamics of the Bipolar Disorders. For Freud, as well as for many contemporary psychoanalysts, mania is understood as an effort to stave off and deny depression; otherwise the superego would flood the ego and overwhelm it. Mania serves the purpose of reaffirming that the ego’s injury has been repaired and the superego conquered. Since the ego has defeated the superego, impulse control is overridden, and the manic or hypomanic individual experiences a tremendous and triumphant feeling of power and elation. Although there is something compelling about this formulation, there is no research evidence that supports it.

Research reported by Dorothy Peven suggests that mania and hypomania develop in predisposed individuals with a specific temperament and personality style. Individuals studied exhibited a biological predisposition or temperament that was characterized by high energy and a tendency to experience strong emotion, both positive and negative, including irritability. These individuals were rated as sensitizers rather than repressors and sensation seekers rather than stimulus avoiders. In other words, these were high-energy, emotional individuals who tended to be risk takers.

Their personality structures were characterized by a strong need to please and impress others, as

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well as to set high expectations and standards for themselves. Because of their high need for achievement, these individuals tended to push themselves to be successful so as to impress others and win their admiration. Nevertheless, they also tended to harbor an inner, covert rebellion against this sense of obligation to achieve. While they felt oppressed by this obligation, they did not feel confident to ignore it either. Therefore, they lived with feelings of not being good enough and not having accomplished enough.

In other words, these individuals were ambitious people who burdened themselves with inappropriate goals for achievement. Their strategy was to impatiently lunge in the general direction of their ambitious goals, despite a reasonably high probability that this strategy would fail. Unfortunately, such failure did not end their need to impress. Thus, while in a manic or hypomanic phase, they tried to overwhelm others with their fantasies and grandiose ideas and plans. Since this strategy did not allow for gradual, straightforward movement, they invariably experienced feelings of inferiority over their "failures" and withdrew in "defeat." The reason for this was that they suffered from low self-esteem and believed that they must be responsible at all costs. They only al-

lowed themselves to see the world in concrete opposites. If no grandiose success could be achieved, they concluded that only dismal failure could occur. Instead of recognizing their goals and strategies as inappropriate, they blamed themselves for their failures. Therefore, while mania was their heightened attempt to achieve impressive defeats, depression was their exhaustive refusal to participate in life when it denied them their achievement and left them faced with the burden of achieving. Dorothy Peven, rather than seeing mania as a defense against depression, speculates that it is an intensified protest against burdensome tasks in biologically predisposed individuals.

THE HYPOMANIC PERSONALITY

Several lines of research suggest that three personality styles predispose individuals to bipolar I or II disorder: narcissistic personality, cyclothymic personality, and—most especially—hypomanic personality. The hypomanic personality has been a part of the psychiatric and psychoanalytic literature for nearly a century. Recently, interest in this personality style has been revived due to the clinical and research focus on both the personality disorders and the so-called bipolar-spectrum disorders. Unlike hypomania, which is an episode of an elevated mood that must last at least four days, hypomanic personality refers to a style of both character and temperament that is stable, fixed, and enduring rather than episodic. Currently, hypomanic personality disorder is not included as a distinct and separate diagnostic entity in DSM-IV, but it is included in the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-9).

Clinical Features of the Hypomanic Personality.

The hypomanic personality is consistently described in the literature as high-energy, playful, and talkative, needing little sleep, success-oriented, and prone to work addiction, but also characterized by defective empathy, impulsivity, disregard of limits, meddlesomeness, and a corruptible conscience.

Salman Akhtar, M.D., has succinctly described the clinical features of the hypomanic personality. He notes that the self-concept of individuals with this disorder is grandiose and overconfident. They share a sense of specialness with narcissistic personalities. Moreover, they tend to be cheerful and optimistic most of the time and have little doubt about their capacity to make things happen. Nevertheless, they are given to self-doubt and find being alone difficult. Their cognitive style is characterized as glib, articulate, and knowledgeable. They have a penchant for recalling trivia and enjoy punning and the playful

use of language. Although they may have a breadth of knowledge, they often lack depth in most areas. In terms of interpersonal relationships, they quickly and easily develop a broad network of friends and acquaintances yet exhibit empathic deficits. They also have a tendency toward the overidealization of others, which can easily switch to contempt. Typically, they foster one or two extremely dependent relationships with individuals who serve and care for them. With regard to love and sexuality, they tend to be seductive and flirtatious and are fond of gossip and sexual innuendo. Hypomanic personalities may be sexually precocious and promiscuous. Sustaining a commitment to an intimate partner may be difficult. They find equality in such relationships disquieting, preferring to be the dominant individual instead. In terms of social adaptation, they tend to be successful in their endeavors because of their energetic, workaholic style and because of their capacity to be decisive and daring. In the process, they may display questionable judgment in social and financial matters. Not surprisingly, they gravitate toward leadership positions. Unfortunately, they become inordinately dependent on praise and acclaim. While these individuals tend to be enthusiastic about ethical and moral standards, they also may cut ethical corners and can be corrupted. In their enthusiasm, they tend to set high standards for themselves and others, though they may fall considerably short of them. Because of their fascination with all aspects of life, they can become particularly enamored of new trends in psychology, philosophy, and theology. Akhtar notes that they may deliberately mock conventional authority.

Comparison with the Narcissistic Personality.

There is considerable overlap between the hypomanic and narcissistic personalities. Akhtar reports that both individuals display grandiosity, self-absorption, articulateness, seductiveness, and social ease. Both utilize rather primitive defenses, such as splitting and projective identification. However, they differ in important ways. The narcissist tends to devalue others openly while secretly envying them. On the other hand, the hypomanic will be openly friendly to all but privately hold some in contempt. The narcissist tends to be less talkative and seldom utilizes compulsive humor as does the hypomanic. Furthermore, while both are ambitious and extremely active, the narcissist tends to appear steadfast, dedicated, and humorless in his or her pursuits, while the hypomanic will seem more playful, digressive, and suggestible. Finally, the hypomanic individual is unlikely to manifest the vengefulness, vindictiveness, and rage characteristic of the narcissist.

RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS

The religious beliefs and spiritual behaviors of the hypomanic personality are unique. These individuals have a distinctive image of God, manifest a particular style of prayer, and display predictable religious behaviors. These religious and spiritual dynamics reflect their basic spiritual deficit, which is a lack of awareness of grace and an incapacity for gratitude.

Image of God. Hypomanic ministers tend to imagine God as an all-giving father whose only purpose is to love and care for them. As an all-giving father, God looks down on them with great favor. He will make all their grand plans materialize. God is also there to admire their many accomplishments. Because God is all-giving, they assume that God will answer all their prayers. In short, God's purpose is to serve them. They are on Earth not to serve God or others but to be the privileged recipients of others' service. Not surprisingly, they understand faith as their response to an all-giving God; that is, faith is the assurance that their needs and wants will be met and that their various projects will be blessed and flourish.

Prayer Style. Like narcissists, hypomanics believe that God will respond exactly as they request in their prayer, irrespective of the claim God has on them. For them, there is only one type of prayer: petitionary. Prayers of praise and thanksgiving may be for other people, but not for them. In the prayers of hypomanic personalities, bad things may happen to good people, but certainly not to special people like them.

Religious Behavior. Because of their self-preoccupation and the belief that God's purpose is to serve them, hypomanics are likely to be insensitive to the suffering and needs of others. While they can and do engage in acts of charity, they do so for one of two reasons. First, the act is related to the accomplishment of one of their grand plans; that is what is important, not the disadvantaged "little" people who will receive some benefit from it. Second, the charitable act is performed because it will be noticed by others. However, if the charitable efforts of hypomanics fail to bring attention to them, they are less likely to make a donation, lend a listening ear, or offer a helping hand. And when the attention and praise of others stops, so will their charitable behavior.

PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Psychiatric Treatment Issues. Basic to effective psychiatric treatment of ministers with bipolar I and II disorders is a threefold therapeutic task.

Noncompliance with antimanic medications is costly, not only to individual ministers and their communities but to society as well

First, these individuals must accept that they have a serious, chronic illness. Second, they must accept that they need treatment for this illness. Third, they must make a commitment to actively participate in that treatment. The reality is that most bipolar individuals are not effectively treated, primarily because they do not actively participate in their treatment. Psychological factors account for this nonparticipation, and these factors greatly influence their treatment noncompliance, particularly in terms of medication.

While antimanic medications such as lithium carbonate, carbamazepine, and Depakote free most individuals from the severe disruptions of manic and depressive episodes, psychotherapy helps these individuals come to terms with the repercussions of past episodes and comprehend the practical and existential implications of having bipolar disorder. Although not all patients require psychotherapy, most can benefit from one of its modalities, whether individual, family, or group. The clinician can establish an emotionally supportive atmosphere; be cognizant of and focused on general issues related to bipolar illness—specifically, dependency, loss, and need for medication; and encourage the patient to express his or her concerns. Providing such a therapeutic relationship increases the likelihood of medication compliance and sets the stage for formal psychotherapy, should it be indicated.

Formal individual psychotherapy is indicated for those unwilling to take medication in the prescribed manner, those who are suicidal, those in whom a personality disorder (e.g., narcissistic or hypomanic disorder) is prominent, and those for whom issues of

dependency and symbolic loss are particularly problematic. Frederick Goodwin, M.D., and Kay Jamison, Ph.D., indicate that issues of dependency and counter-dependency, poor self-esteem, problems of intimacy, medication noncompliance, and denial of the illness are major issues in psychotherapy for bipolar individuals. It seems that the traumatic experience of the disorder itself and the nature of the treatment result in the losses that dominate the individual's life. Accordingly, Goodwin and Jamison advocate focusing treatment on realistic, symbolic, and unrealistic losses; fears of recurrence; and denial of illness. Realistic losses include decreased energy level, loss of euphoric states, increased need for sleep, decreased sexuality, and possibly decreases in productivity. Symbolic losses include loss of perceived omnipotence and independence. Unrealistic losses include circumstances in which the antimanic medication and psychotherapy come to symbolize the patient's personal failure. That is, the medication becomes a psychological "whipping boy," representing other failure predating the onset of the bipolar illness. A major task of treatment is to help the individual understand and mourn these losses.

Noncompliance with antimanic medications is costly, not only to individual ministers and their communities but to society as well. Individuals who fail to comply with medication have a rather predictable profile. They tend to cite medication side effects and numerous psychological factors as the reasons for their noncompliance. Some or many of the following factors are likely to apply to individuals who are at high risk for medication noncompliance: they tend to be in the first year of antimanic treatment; they may have a prior history of medication noncompliance; they tend to be younger; they are more likely to be male; they have a history of grandiose, euphoric manias rather than the bipolar II presentation; they have elevated mood and fewer episodes; and they complain of "missing highs" when they are in remission of symptoms.

Clinical experience suggests that "missing highs" is the most ominous risk factor. Accordingly, the clinician would do well to elicit the individual's explanatory model, including what bipolar illness and its symptoms represent for them. Since mania or hypomania associated with bipolarity is, for all practical purposes, an endogenous stimulant that can be quite addicting, the "high" is preferred to the "blahs" associated with medications. Noncompliance is the individual's strategy to induce mania, not just when depressed but also when faced with problematic decisions and life events. Since the negative consequences accrue only later, the individual may not easily comprehend how the costs of noncompliance

outweigh the benefits. Similarly, for the individual who has already had a trial of an antimanic medication, the learned association between the use of the antimanic and the subsequent normal mood, or dysphoric state, may come to symbolize a loss of innocence from prepsychotic to postpsychotic consciousness. Thus, medication noncompliance can represent an attempt to recapture an earlier prepsychotic existence, one not yet despoiled by mania or depression. Another important task of psychotherapy is to develop a relapse plan. This would include an assessment of external events and cognitions that are particularly prone to trigger dysphoria or hypomanic feelings, as well as a plan for reducing these factors.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

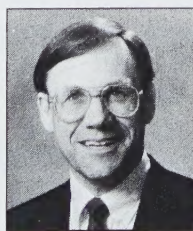
The basic organizational issue regarding ministers with bipolar I and II disorders is the same as the basic threefold therapeutic issue: acceptance of their diagnosis, acceptance of the need for treatment, and active compliance with treatment. Too few bipolar ministers have made a commitment to all three of these therapeutic tasks. While many appear to have accepted their diagnosis and the need for treatment, the third task is the one to which few are truly committed. Keeping appointments with their prescribing psychiatrist and getting their prescriptions filled may signal good intentions, but failure to take medications as specified, unwillingness to begin or continue with psychotherapy, and the sporadic or continuous use of alcohol and various uppers and downers are harbingers of relapse and treatment failure. It should not be surprising that a 1991 study found that the noncompliance with bipolar treatment, or treatment failure rate, is 50 percent within the first six months of treatment and rises to 90 percent within five years. The direct and indirect costs of such treatment failure are astronomical. To the extent to which bipolar I and II ministers have a concurrent hypomanic or narcissistic personality, the treatment failure rate reaches 90 percent or more by virtue of their unredeemed grandiosity, denial, and specialness, which translates to an attitude of, "Other people may not be able to do it, but I'm different. I can handle these symptoms, and no one will tell me otherwise." This attitude toward their psychopathology is more than

a psychiatric disorder. It is a spiritual disorder as well, in that these ministers basically put themselves above God and their superiors and invariably jeopardize the safety and well-being of their community by their defiance. It is for this reason that many psychiatric consultants to dioceses and religious orders endorse a stringent screening policy for ministry candidates. Such a policy would disqualify the majority of candidates with diagnosable bipolar I and II disorders and a hypomanic or narcissistic personality. Unfortunately, many screening committees do not heed such input.

With regard to ministers with bipolar I and II disorders, it is important for religious leaders to recognize that manic and hypomanic symptoms signal a minister's lack of internal control and the need for external limits. It is not uncommon for bipolar ministers who have stabilized to resent the lack of external controls placed on them by their superiors during the active phase of their illness. External limit setting is essential when it comes to the abuse of alcohol, recreational drugs, and addictive prescription medications, as well as money spending, late-night phone calls, hypersexual behavior, and the like.

RECOMMENDED READING

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BOOK REVIEW

Three Centuries of Lasallian Identity by Pedro María Gil. Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1998. 392 pages. 24,500 lire (approx. \$14.00).

The exploration of the future of religious life and the church within it has benefited greatly from historical and sociological research. This volume on the relationship between mission and spirituality in the largest male lay Catholic congregation is more important for its methodological contribution than for the particular details of research on the institute that is its subject.

The author builds his case on the premise that the identity of an active community—in this case, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, founded by John Baptist de la Salle in 1680—is developed by the integration of a characteristic spirituality and a particular mission of the institute. This congregation was founded for the service of the poor through education, incarnating its mission in schools. It developed a spirituality drawing on the French school and Jesuit and other influences of the time. A central thesis of the book is that active congregations have their mission, and therefore their identity, molded as much by the forces of change in society as it relates to their ministry as by any decisions of their own.

The author details developments in education, spirituality, religious life, and, to a lesser extent, the church through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, with a focus on France. He documents four moments of refounding of the institute. One occurred during the mid-eighteenth century, when the fledgling community developed a certain size and the necessity for a more formal leadership structure, well after the original papal and royal approvals. The second and third refoundings came after the suppressions of the institute in France in the early days of the French Revolution, and during the secularization of 1904.

The institute flourished in the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century after suppression—but not because of an incarnational spirituality that adapted effectively by discerning the signs of the

times and responding creatively to God's will for the brothers. Rather, the congregation's idea—popular schools available to the poor without cost—resonated with Enlightenment ideals and gave a practical model to a civil society without the least expertise or even commitment to this progressive, modern move, which had already been pioneered for over a century by this community.

After the 1904 suppression, the global expanse of the brothers received the exiles enthusiastically. The institute was truly indigenized beyond its homeland. However, these upheavals deflected the congregation, in the author's view, from the reform of identity and rule that was warranted by developments in both theology and the educational needs of society.

The fourth moment in the refounding—the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Chapter, with its *Declaration on the Christian Brother in the Modern World*, eventual revision of the Rule, massive decentralization, and shift from French cultural hegemony—consume the last two of the book's nine chapters and an epilogue on conclusions for the future. It is the thesis of the author that the four decades past are like the whole of the three centuries, in terms of their radical contributions to the identity formation of this institute.

He outlines five phases: (1) desperate integrity after the war and the euphoria of school expansion and institute growth in the 1950s; (2) the enthusiasm and reforms of Vatican II and the associated Chapter; (3) the crisis in models of social development as they influenced educators; (4) the lowered expectations as numbers decreased and reforms were integrated into congregation life, as well as the diminished prospects for growth and the sharing of the mission with those colleagues who would continue the schools as brothers dwindled in numbers; and (5) the developing global society of which this congregation is a sharer, if not a shaper, in its educational mission.

The volume ends with the implications of this last shift for Lasallian spirituality, community, mission, and identity. The analysis, though documented by the specific experience and texts of this institute, raises questions for any active religious community as it faces the dynamics of modern society, the evolution and analysis of its charism, and an incarnational spirituality that affirms God's presence in the course of human history.

—Brother Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C.